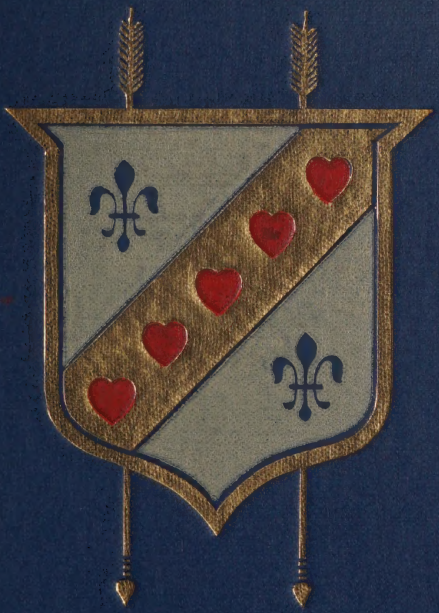
MONTLIVET



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MONTLIVET

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MONTLIVET

By ALICE PRESCOTT SMITH

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TO

M. C. H. AND A. E. H.

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MONTLIVET

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CHAPTER I

THE KEY

THE May sun was shining on Michillimackinac, and I, Armand de Montlivet, was walking the strip of beach in front of the French garrison.

I did not belong to Michillimackinac. I had come in only the day before with two canoes and four men, and I was bound for the beaver lands further west. A halt was necessary, for the trip had been severe, and remembering that it was necessity, and not idleness, that held me, I was enjoying the respite. My heart was light, and since the heart is mistress of the heels, I walked somewhat trippingly. I was on good terms with myself at the moment. My venture was going well, and I was glad to be alone, and breathe deep of the sweet spring air, and let my soul grow big with the consciousness of what it would like to do. So content was I, that I was annoyed to see La Mothe-Cadillac approach.

Yet Cadillac was important to me then. He was commandant at Michillimackinac, — the

year was 1695, — and so was in control of the strategic point of western New France. The significance of all that he stood for, and all that he might accomplish, filled my thought as he swaggered toward me now, and I said to myself, somewhat complacently, that, with all his air of importance, I had a fuller conception than he of what lay in his palm.

He hailed me without preface. "Where do you find food for your laughter in this forsaken country, Montlivet? I have watched you swagger up and down with a smile on your face for the last hour. What is the jest?"

In truth, there was no jest in me by the time he finished. My own thought had just called him a swaggerer, and now he clapped the same phrase back at me.

"There are more swaggerers upon this beach than I," I cried hotly, and I felt my blood rise.

My tone was more insulting than my words, and Cadillac, too, grew red. I saw the veins upon his neck begin to swell, and all my childish irritation vanished.

"Come, monsieur," I hastened; "I was wrong. But I meant no harm, and surely here is a jest fit for your laughter, that two grown men should stand and swell at each other like turkeycocks, all because they are drunk with the air of a May day. Come, here is my hand."

"But you said that I"—

"And what if I did?" I interrupted. I had fallen into step, and was pacing by his side. "What is there in the term that we should hold it in slight esteem? I swagger. What does that mean, after all, but my acknowledgment of the presence of Dame Opportunity, and my admission that I would like to impress her; to draw her eye in my direction. Surely that is laudable, monsieur."

Cadillac laughed. His tempers were the ruffle of a passing breeze upon deep water. "So you think that I swagger to meet opportunity? Well, if I do, I get but little out of it. Sometimes I push myself near enough to pluck at the sleeve of the dame; oftener she passes me by."

"Yet she gave you this key to an empire," I suggested. I had been rude, and I repented it, and more than that, there was something in the man that tempted me to offer him flattery even as I desire to give sweets to an engaging child.

But this cajolery he swept away with a fling of his heavy arm. "The key to an empire!" he echoed contemptuously. "They are fine words, and the mischief is that they are true. Yet food in my stomach, and money in my pocket, would mean more to me just now. I must speak to this Indian. Will you wait for me, monsieur? I have business with you."

I bowed, and resumed my walk. "The key to an empire!" I said my own words over, and could have blushed for their tone of bombast. They were true, but they sounded false. I looked at my surroundings, and marveled that a situation that was of real dignity could wear so mean a garb. The sandy cove where I stood was on the mainland, and sheltered four settlements. Behind lay the forest; in front stretched Lake Huron, a waterway that was our only link with the men and nations we had left behind. The settlements were contiguous in body, but even my twenty-four hours' acquaintance had shown me that they were leagues apart in mind. There were a French fort, a Jesuit convent, a village of Ottawas, and, barred by the aristocracy of a palisade, a village of Hurons. The scale of precedence was plain to read. The huts of the savages were wattled, interlaced of poles and bark; the French buildings were of wood, but roofed with rough cedar; the only houses with board roofs were those of the Jesuits. In later times when I found Father Carheil hard to understand, I used to say to myself that he was not to be held too strictly to account for his contradictions, for though one learns to think great thoughts in the wilderness, it is not done easily when there is sawed lumber to shut away the sky.

Cadillac came back to me in a few moments.

He had lost his swelling port, and was frowning with thought. "I saw you in the Huron camp, Montlivet," he said. "Do you understand their speech?"

Now this was a question that I thought it as well to put by. "Would you call it speech?" I demurred. "It sounded more like snarling."

"Then you do understand it?"

I kicked at the dogs at my feet. "Frowns are a common language. I could understand them, at least. The camp is restless. Are they hungry?"

Cadillac shrugged his shoulders. "Possibly. But it is not hunger that sagamité or maize cakes can reach. Would a taste of Iroquois broth put them in better condition, do you think?"

I turned away somewhat sickened. "It is a savage remedy," I broke out. "And a good cook will catch his hare before he talks of putting it in the pot. Where is your Iroquois hare, Monsieur de la Mothe-Cadillac?"

The commandant shook his head. "My hare is still at large," he confessed. "Though just now — Come, Monsieur de Montlivet, let us to plain speech. We are talking as slantingly as savages. I have a Huron messenger at my quarters. Come with me, and interpret."

"A messenger from your own camp?"

"Is it my own camp?" he queried soberly. "I

do not know. I have reason to think that many of my Hurons are ripe for English bribes, — or even for the Iroquois. It is a strange menagerie that I rule over here, and the Hurons are the foxes, — when they are not trying to be lions. You say that their camp is restless. I do not speak their language, but I can tell you more. They are in two factions. Those who follow old Kondiaronk, the Rat, are fairly loyal, but the faction under the Baron would sell us to the English for the price of a cask of rum. Truly our scalps sit lightly on our heads here in this garrison."

I hesitated. I did not like this situation, and prudence whispered that I had best cut the conversation here, and make my way as swiftly as possible to the west. But curiosity urged me to one more question. I asked it with my lips pursing to a whistle, that I might seem indifferent. "Is the messenger from the Baron?"

Cadillac nodded contentedly. "So you have decided to help me," he said, with a smile that read my indecision perfectly, and I felt, with a rush of blood to my face, much less sure of myself, and more respect for him. "I wish that I had inducements to keep you here," he went on, "for I hear from Montreal that you have wonderful command of Indian dialects. But I will take what you are willing to give, and be thank-

ful. As to this messenger, — this is the tale. Some months ago a small band of Hurons left here for the south. Hunting, or war, or diplomacy, how shall I say what was their errand? But I mistrust them, for they are followers of the Baron. They returned this morning, and are in camp on the island. Their sending a messenger in advance looks as if they had a prisoner, and so desired to be welcomed in state. If the prisoner should be an Iroquois" —

Now certain tales were fresh in my ears, and so I did not like the implication of the unfinished sentence, and hastened to cover it. "It is a favorable sign, monsieur, that the messenger came to you first."

"How do I know that he came to me first? He came to me — yes. But because a snake slips out of one hole, can you swear that he has not been in another? Will you go to him now?"

There was no door open for escape, and the matter was not important enough for me to be willing to force one. "If you wish," I agreed.

Cadillac looked relieved. "Good! You will find the messenger at my quarters. I shall let you go alone, for I can make nothing of the man's speech, and he smells somewhat rancid for a close acquaintance. When you are through, you will find me here."

I bowed, and made my way to his quarters.

I knew as I opened his door that I might be entering more than appeared upon the surface, but the excitement of the game was worth the hazard, — even the hazard of a possible delay, — and I pushed the door wide, and went in.

The Huron was sitting in the middle of the floor, handling his calumet with some ostentation. The Hurons were but the remnant of a race, for Iroquois butchery had reduced them in numbers and in spirit, but even in their exile they preserved a splendor of carriage that made the Ottawas, who camped beside them here, seem but a poor and shuffling people. This man was a comely specimen, and he was decked to do honor to the moment. His blanket was clean, and his head freshly shaved except for a bristling ridge that ran, like a cock's comb, across his crown, and that dripped sunflower oil over his shoulders.

He handed me his calumet, and we smoked for the time required by ceremony, then he rose, and drew two beaver skins from the folds of his blanket.

"The sun has smiled upon us," he said, with a certain sedate pomposity which, like the black crest on his head, might be ludicrous in itself, but seemed fitting enough in him. "I speak for my people who are in camp upon the island. We have been upon strange rivers, and over moun-

tains where the very name of Frenchman is unknown. Yet we have returned, and we come to you at once, as the partridge to her young. We are glad to see a Frenchman's face again. We confirm what we have said by giving these beavers."

I smoked for a moment, then leaned over and kicked the skins into the corner. "Why these words?" I asked, with a slow shrug. "Does the leg thank the arm for its service? Does the mouth give flatteries and presents to the tongue? We of Michillimackinac are all of one body. My brother must be drunk with the bad rum of the English traders, that he should come to me in this way. No, if my brother has anything to say, let him think it aloud without ceremony, as if speaking to his own heart. Let him save his beavers till he goes to treat with strangers."

There was a long silence. The Huron wrapped his blanket closer, and looked at me, while I stared back as unwinkingly. His face was a mask, but I thought — as I have thought before and since when at the council fire — that there was amusement in the very blankness of his gaze, and that my effort to outdo him at his own mummery somewhat taxed his gravity. When he spoke at last he told his story concisely.

A half hour later, I went in search of Cadillac. He heard my step on the crunching gravel, and

when I was still rods away, he laid his finger on his lips for silence. I went to him rather resentfully, for I had had no mind to shout my news in the street of the settlement, and I thought that he was acting like a child. But he took no notice of my pique, and clapped me on the shoulder as if we were pot-companions.

"Hush, man," he whispered fretfully. "Your look is fairly shouting the news abroad. No need to keep your tongue sealed, when you carry such a tell-tale face. So they have an Iroquois?"

I dropped my shoulder away from under his hand. "If that is the news that you say I shouted, no harm is done, — save to my honor. No, they have no Iroquois."

Cadillac stopped. "No Iroquois!" he echoed heavily.

"No, monsieur. They have an Englishman."

It was as if I had struck him. He stepped back, and his face grew dull red.

"A spy?"

I shook my head. I could feel my blood pumping hard, but I answered by rote. "Not by the Huron's story."

The commandant snapped his fingers. "That for his story! As idle as wind in the grass!" he snorted. "But what did he say?"

I grew as laconic as the Huron. "That they left here as a hunting party," I said categorically.

"That they soon joined a war party of Algonquins, and went with them to the English frontier. I could make little of his geography, but I infer that they went in the direction of Boston, — though not so far. There the Algonquins fell upon a village, where they scalped and burned to their fill. He says that the Hurons remained neutral, and this prisoner, he maintains, is theirs by purchase. They bought him from the Algonquins for two white dressed deerskins, and they have treated him well. They have found him a man of spirit and importance, and they ask that you make a suitable feast in honor of what they have done. The Huron is waiting for your answer."

Cadillac had listened nodding, and his reply was ready. "Tell him that they must bring the prisoner to-morrow early, — soon after daybreak. Tell him that Monsieur de la Mothe-Cadillac knows his part, and that the kettles shall be full of dog-meat, and the young men painted and ready for the dancing." He spoke rapidly, his hand on his sword, and his great shoulders lifted as if eager to meet their new burden. He turned to me with a smile that would have conquered enmity in a wolf. "This is great news, Montlivet. I could almost ask you to drink the health of the Baron, and all his scurvy, seditious crew. For, look you, even if the Englishman is

a spy, and the Hurons have brought him here to make a secret treaty, why, he is in our hands, and Boston is a continent away. He will have opportunity to learn some French before he goes back to his codfish friends. What say you, monsieur?"

I laughed rather ruefully. I saw that the game was to be exciting, and I had never been backward at a sport. Yet I knew that I must turn my face from it.

"What do I say?" I repeated. "Nothing, monsieur, but that I am a trader, not a diplomat, and that to-morrow I must be on my way to the west. I will take your answer to the Huron. Monsieur, I hope you will sleep long and sweetly to-night. You will need a clear head to-morrow."

Cadillac looked at me, and wagged his head. "Good-day to you, trader," he said, with one of his noiseless laughs. "How well you must sleep who have no thought beyond your beaver skins, — even though you do carry brandy and muskets hidden in your cargo. Never mind, never mind. Keep your secrets. Only see that Father Carheil does not smell your brandy, or I may be forced to send you back to Montreal."

CHAPTER II

THE CAPTIVE

I WOKE the next morning, saying, "I must keep out of this," and I knew that I had said it in my slumber. It is pitiful that a man should be so infirm of will that he need cosset his resolution in this fashion, and I kicked the dogs from the door of my cabin, and went out to meet the world in a bad humor.

It was a still world in the great sky and water spaces, but a noisy one upon the shore. Early as it was — the night dusk was still lingering — the kettles were simmering, and the Indians decked for a holiday. The sense of approaching action was powder to my nostrils, and added to my spleen; so though I went down upon the beach, and joined Cadillac and his officers, I was but surly company, and soon turned my back upon them, to stare off at the lake.

It was a breezeless morning, and the lake was without ripple. It lay like one of the metal mirrors that we sell the Indians, a lustreless gray sheet that threw back twisted pictures. I looked off at the east, and thought of the dull leagues that lay behind me, and the uncounted ones

before, and I realized that the morning air was cold, and that I hated the dark, secret water that led through this strange land. Yet, even as I scowled at it, the disk of the sun climbed over the island's rim, and laid a shining pathway through the gray, — a pathway that ended at my feet.

I felt my pulse quicken. After all, it was a fair world, and the air, though keen, was a cordial. I let my gaze travel up that shining, glimmering track, and while I looked it was suddenly flecked with canoes. Long and brown, they swung down toward me like strong-winged birds upheld by the path of the sunrise.

I looked back at the Indians. They, too, had seen the canoes, but they made no sound of welcome. Bedizened and wolf-eyed, they stood in formal ranks as attentive as children at a pantomime. In a moment the canoes took clearer shape, and the shine of the paddles could be seen as the flat of the blades slanted toward the light. The men at the paddles were indistinguishable, crouching shapes, but their prisoner was standing. He stood in the foremost canoe, and as his figure was outlined against the sun I saw that he was rigid as a mummy. I turned to Cadillac. To see a white man bound! I could feel the thongs eating into my own flesh.

"They have bound the Englishman!" I protested. "Let us hope that they are not daring

enough — or crazed enough — to make him sing to grace their triumph."

But he laughed at my tone. "What does it matter?" he shrugged. "These wards of mine — my happy family — must have their fête in their own fashion, or they will ask that I pay the piper. Well, whatever they do, the prisoner is in our hands, and it will be long before he escapes them. Yes, listen, — oh, the play-acting dogs! — they are making him sing now."

He had a keen ear, for, even to my forest-trained sense, the sound came but faintly. The crowd hushed its breathing, and the air was unwholesomely still. A dog yelped, and an Indian silenced it with a kick. Each paddle-stroke threw the canoes into sharper relief, and we could distinguish lank arms, and streaming hair. The prisoner's voice echoed as clear as if he were in some great playhouse, and were singing to gain the plaudits of a friendly throng.

I felt my blood tingling in my fingers' ends. It was a brave song, bravely sung. I could not understand the English words, but the sound was rollicking with defiance. It was a glove thrown in our faces; the challenge of a brave man to a cowardly foe.

"The plucky beggar!" I said half aloud, and I set my teeth hard.

But Cadillac was nudging my elbow. "You

said that the prisoner was a man of importance," he accused, with a perplexed frown. "But, listen! He has the voice of a boy."

I was greedy to hear, so, with a wave of the hand, I shook Cadillac away. But, in truth, I was disturbed. The tones were certainly boyish.

The canoes came within bowshot, and the hush that held the camp suddenly broke like the release of pent waters. There were yells and stamping, the smash of tom-toms, and a scattering salvo of musketry. It was a united roar that shut out from our consciousness the thought of the calm sky and the silent water.

The canoes had come as unswervingly as arrows, and the one that held the prisoner landed at my feet. I looked up, and met his eyes, and I swept my hat from my head.

"You are among friends," I called, not knowing that I did so.

It was a foolish speech, since the prisoner could not understand; but I suppose that my tone was kind, for it apparently gave him courage. At least, a flush that might have been the color of returning hope rose in his cheeks. I was relieved at his appearance, for he was not the little lad that his song had made me fear. He was slim and beardless, but there were sorrow and understanding in his look that could not

come with childhood. For the rest, he was dark and gaunt from exposure and privation. His rough woolen suit, leather-lined, hung loosely on him, but he wore it with a jauntiness that matched the bravado of his song.

Cadillac came forward in welcome. He was always an orator that the Indians themselves envied, and now his rhetoric was as unhampered as though he thought that the prisoner was following each flowing syllable. As he unbound the stiffened arms — they were pitifully thin and small, I thought — he called all mythology to witness his deep regret that this indignity should have been offered to his brother of the white race. I followed him and listened, storing away metaphors even as I carried beads in my cargo. I should need all the eloquence at my command before the close of the summer, and my own tongue was always too direct of speech.

Cadillac felt me at his elbow, and when he saw my listening face he stopped to give me a slow wink. "Will monsieur turn pupil to learn swaggering?" he asked, with an upward cock of the eye. "I had thought him too old for a school."

I bowed, and hated myself for my lagging wits that would not furnish a retort. "Never too old to sit at your feet," I assured him, and I went away knowing that I had been slow, and

that the honors were with him, but knowing, also, that somehow I liked the man, and that I should drink his health when I opened my next tierce of canary.

I went to find my men, and it was time that I bestirred myself. License was in order, and the revel assaulted eyes, ears, and nose, till a white man was wise if he forsook his dignity, and ran like a fox to cover. The air was surfeiting with the steam of food. Dog-meat bubbled in great caldrons, and maize cakes crackled on hot stones. A bear had been brought in, and was being hacked in pieces to add to the broth. The women did this, and as I passed them they stopped, with their hands dripping red, and shook their wampum necklaces at me, and pointed meaningly toward a neighboring hut, where I had been told that rum could be bought if you were discreet in choosing your occasion. I tossed them a handful of small coins, and warned them in Huron that if they molested my men I should report them to the commandant. I felt yet more haste to see my canoes under way.

I was plunging on in this fashion when Father Carheil plucked at my sleeve. "Do you think you are running from the Iroquois?" he grumbled, and he pushed his irritable, brilliant face close to mine. It was an old face, lined and withered, and the hair above it was scanty

and gray, but never have I met a look that showed more fire and unconquerable will. "The commandant wishes you," he went on. "He asked me to fetch you. I should not have complied — it is I who should ask services of him — but I wished to speak to you on my own account. Monsieur, do you know these men that you have in your employ?"

I nodded. "As well as I know my own heart. They are my habitants."

"Your habitants! Then you have a seigniory? Why do you not stay there as the king wishes?"

I shook my head at him. "We use large words in this new land, father. Yes, I have a seigniory. That is, I own some barren acres near Montreal that I can occupy only at risk of my scalp. As to the king, I think he wishes me to trade, — at least I carry his license to that effect. But what are my men doing?"

The Jesuit's thin old hands clutched each other. "They are turning this place into a Sodom," he said passionately. "They are drinking and carousing with the Indian women. You traders are our ruin. But we will shut you out of the country yet. Mark my words. Those twenty-five licenses will be revoked before the season ends, and you will have to find other excuses to bring your rabble here to debauch our missions."

In view of what I had just seen, I felt impatient. "You do my handful of stolid peasants too much honor," I said dryly. "They would need more wit and ingenuity than I have ever seen in them to be able to teach outlawry to anything that they find here. But I am looking for them now. You will pardon me if I hasten."

But his hand pulled at me. "Is one of your men lipped like a bull-moose and red as Rufus?"

"Pierre Boudin to the life," I chuckled. "What deviltry is he at now?"

The priest's face lost its flame. He looked suddenly the old man worn out in the service of a savage people. "He is with an Ottawa girl," he said sadly; "a girl the Indians call Singing Arrow for her wit and her laughter. She is not a convert, but she is a good girl. I wish you would get your man away."

I felt shame for my man and myself. "I will go at once," I promised soberly. "I will be westward bound by afternoon."

The old priest looked at me with friendly eyes. "There will be trouble before sundown," he said gravely. "If you wish to get away, go quickly, or you may not go at all. Now you must report to the commandant."

But I had turned my face the other way. "Not till I have found Pierre," I returned.

I had no summer stroll before me. Pierre,

Anak that he was, was as lost as a leaf in a whirlpool, and though I had quick eyes, and shoulders that could force a passage for me in a crowd, I could see no sign of his oriole crest of red head in all the bobbing multitude of blackbirds. Instead I stumbled upon Cadillac.

He linked his arm in mine. "Do you know," he said abruptly, "the prisoner has spirit and to spare. He may be a man of importance after all."

I answered like a fool. "I think not. He is dressed like a yeoman."

Cadillac put me at arm's length, and puffed his cheeks with silent laughter. "Plumage, eh? Are you willing to be judged by your own?" He stopped to let his glance rest on my shabby gear. "Truly it must be a long year since you fronted a mirror, or you would not be so complacent. No, monsieur, the prisoner is a gentleman. No yeoman ever carried his head with such a poise. But who is he? I would give all the pistoles in my pocket — though, in faith, they 're few enough — if I could understand English. But you may be able to help me. Go speak to the prisoner in Huron. He must have picked up something of the Indian speech in his trip here."

This was my opportunity. "Monsieur," I said, "I should like an understanding. Re-

member how little all this can mean to me, — a trader, — and do not think me churlish if I try to keep myself free from this intrigue. I will go to the prisoner now, if you wish; but, that done, I beg you to hold me excused of any further service in this matter."

Cadillac looked me over, and now his glance went, not to my doublet, but to the man within. "A trader!" he said curtly. "A trader carrying contraband brandy. A good commandant would send you back where you belong. No, no, monsieur, wait! I am not threatening you. Though you know as well as I that the thumbscrews are rather convenient to my hand should I care to use them. But there should be no necessity for that. Montlivet, I hardly understand your reluctance in the matter of this Englishman. We should be one in this affair, whatever our private concerns. Even Black Gown and I — and the world says we are not lovers — are working together. Why do you draw back?"

I could not meet him with less than the truth. "You have stated the reason, monsieur. My private concerns, — they seem large to me, and I fear to jeopard them by becoming entangled here. I regret this. You have shown me great clemency in the matter of the brandy, — though if you had confiscated it I should still have

pushed on, — and for that, and for your own sake, monsieur, I should be glad to serve you."

He looked at my outstretched palm, and laid his own upon it. "'T is fairly spoken," he said slowly, "and I think you mean it." Then he grew peevish. "A pest on this country!" he cried. "We are all kings in disguise, and have a monarchy hidden in our hats. And what does it amount to? No bread, no wine, no thanks; a dog's life and a jackal's death, — and all to hold some leagues of barren land for his petticoat-ridden majesty at Versailles. Oh, why not say it? We can tell the truth here without losing our heads."

"The king's arm" — I began.

"Is long," he interrupted. "Yet, in truth, your face is longer. Are you so eager to be gone? Well, get you to the prisoner, and, my hand on it, I shall ask for nothing more."

CHAPTER III

BEHIND THE COMMANDANT'S DOOR

THE commandant's door had come to be the portal through which I stepped from safety into meddling. Yet I opened it now with laughter peeping from my sleeve. To bait the Englishman in Huron seemed a good-natured enough jest, and full of possibilities.

But one look at the prisoner drained my laughter. He was lying on a bench, his face hidden in his out-flung arms, and his slenderness and helplessness pulled at me hard. I knew that despair, and even tears, must have conquered now that he was alone, and I wished that I might save his pride, and slip away until he had fought back his bravery, and had himself in hand.

But he had heard my step, and drew himself up to face me. He turned with composure, and fronted me with so much dignity that I stood like a blundering oaf trapped by my own emotion. There was no emotion in his look. He had been thinking, not despairing, and his face was sharpened and lighted with such concentration that I felt slapped with cold steel. He looked

all intellect and determination, — a thing of will-power rather than flesh and brawn.

My Huron speech seemed out of place, but there was no choice left me, so I used it. There was refuge for my dignity in the sonorous syllables, and I spoke as to a fellow sachem. Then I asked the prisoner his name, and waited for response.

None came. I knew that I had spoken rapidly, so I tried again. I chose short words, and framed my sentences like a schoolmaster.

The prisoner listened negligently. Then he put out his hand. "Pardon, monsieur. But I speak French, — though indifferently," he said, with a slight shrug.

My anger made my ears buzz; I would not bandy words with a man of so small and sly a spirit. I turned to leave.

But the prisoner stepped between me and the door. "You were sent here with a message," he said; "I am listening."

His sunken brown eyes were so deep in melancholy that I could not hold my wrath. "Was it a gentleman's part to lead me on to play the clown?" I asked. "I came in kindness."

He smiled a little, — a bitter smile that did not reach his eyes. "I am not, like you, a gentleman by birth, monsieur," he said slowly, "and so often trip in my behavior. Granted that you

were amusing, — and you were, monsieur, — can you blame me for using you for a diversion? I infer that you have come to tell me that the time left me, either for amusement or penitence, is short."

It was bravely said, but I knew from the careful repression of his tone that his hardness was a brittle veneer. He was young to carry so bold a front when his heart must be hammering, and I would willingly have talked any doggerel to have afforded him another smile.

"I know nothing of your future," I hastened, "save that, arguing from your youth, it will probably be a long one. It was your past that I was sent to ask concerning. The commandant sent me. Since you speak French, my mission is over. The commandant will come himself."

The prisoner laid his hand upon a chair. "Will you sit? I would rather it be you than the commandant, if it must be any one. What were you sent to ask?"

I waved away the chair, for I thought of the passing moments and of what I had promised Father Carheil. "I must hasten," I said irritably. "What was I to ask? Why, your name, the account of your capture, — the story of your being here, in brief."

He saw that I glanced at the door, and he walked over to it. "Wait!" he interposed. "I

can answer you in a line. But one question first. Monsieur, I — I" —

"Yes, monsieur."

"Monsieur, I — I must think a moment. Be patient, if you will."

His voice was calm, but there was something in his look that forced my pity. "Tell me nothing that I must not tell the commandant," I warned. "But be assured of my good will."

I think he did not hear. He sat with his forehead on his hand, and I knew that he was thinking. He looked up with a new decision in his glance.

"Monsieur, you lead a strange life in this place. I see nothing but men. Have you no families?"

I swore under my breath. I had expected some meat from his remark, and he gave me trivialities. I had no time for social preliminaries, and I felt sudden distaste for him. I pointed him to the window.

"We are not all men. There are Indian women in plenty. Shall I draw the shade that you may see? There are many of my countrymen to tell you that they find them fair."

"But are there no white families in the settlement?" He was leaning forward, and he ignored the insult of my air.

I shook my head. "None, monsieur. None short of Montreal."

He tapped the floor, and frowned. His look went beyond me, and he was absorbed. "None short of Montreal. Indeed you live a strange life. Monsieur, is it far to Montreal?"

I shrugged. "Yes, it is a long journey. Come, monsieur, we waste time. I wish you good-day."

He glanced up quickly. His was a misleading face, for while his words were meaningless, and showed him of a small and trifling mind, his look was yet keen. He saw that I had wearied of him, and he put out his hand to beg my attention.

"Wait, monsieur!" he cried.

"Monsieur, you waste my time."

"I shall waste no more. I have made up my mind. Listen. I promised you my story." He had regained all his quiet arrogance. "It is soon told. I am an Englishman, — or a colonist, if you like the term better. I was in a village on the Connecticut frontier, when your savages came down upon us. No, I am wrong. They did nothing so manly as to come down upon us boldly. They slid among us like foul vermin afraid of the light. They achieved a notable victory, monsieur. I see that you recognize their prowess, and that the feast you have prepared for them is lavish. It was a noble battle. I regret you could not have seen it. There were

some hundreds of the Indians, and a scattering handful of us. A quiet farming community, monsieur, that worked hard, supped early, and slept the deep sleep of quiet living and sober minds. We waked to find the scalping knives at our throats, and the death scream of children in our ears. Look over the bags of scalps, and see the number of women and old men that your braves had to overcome. You will be proud of them, monsieur."

I clenched my hand, and wished myself elsewhere. "But our Hurons say they were neutral," I defended.

He lifted his brows. "You prefer to give all the praise to the Algonquins?" he asked smoothly. "I understand. Yes, I have heard that the Algonquins stand even closer to you than your Hurons here. They are more than brothers. Indeed, it is said that your Count Frontenac calls them his children. Well, they did you credit. It took ten of them to silence Goodman Ellwood's musket, but they butchered him in the end. If you find a scalp with long silky white hair, monsieur, it belongs to John Ellwood. Value it, and nail it among your trophies, for it cost you the lives of a full half-dozen Algonquin braves."

I kept my eyes down. I had come here to unearth a certain fact, and I would pursue it. "But were the Hurons neutral?" I persisted.

I could not even guess at what raw nerve I touched, but he suddenly threw his arms wide as men do when a shot is mortal. His cool insolence dropped from him, and he was all fire and helpless defiance. He stamped his foot, till, slender as he was, the boards rang. "Were the Hurons neutral?" he mocked, in a voice so like my own I could have sworn it was an echo. "What manner of man are you? Are you made of chalk? If you had seen a child's brains dashed out against a tree, would you stop to ask the Indian who held the dripping corpse what dialect he spoke? Oh, a man should be ashamed to live who has seen such things, and who keeps his sword sheathed while one of your Indian family — brothers or children — remains alive! If you had blood in your veins, you would be man enough not to put even an enemy upon the rack, in this way, and force him to live that time over to glut your curiosity. Here is my answer, which you may take to your commandant. I am an Englishman, I am your prisoner, and you are to remember that I am, first, last, and at all times, your foe. Now go to your commandant, and tell him to keep himself and his schoolboy orations out of my way."

He was shaking, and his face was dead white. I did not answer, but I took him by the arm, and led him to a chair. He tried to resist, but I

am strong. Then I brought him a cup of water from a pail that stood near by.

"Drink it," I said, "and when food is sent you, eat what you can. Your race is not over, and if you wish to trick and outwit us, — as you were planning when I found you lying here, — you will need more strength than you are showing now. I have but one more question. You must tell me your name."

For a moment he did not reply. He was still shaking painfully, and water from the cup in his hand splashed over him. "My name," he said slowly, "my name is — is Benjamin Starling."

I took the cup away. "I am waiting," I said after a pause.

"Waiting for what, monsieur?" When he willed, he could speak winningly, and he did it now.

I took paper from my pocket. "For your real name," I answered. "I shall write it here, and you must swear that it is true. Don't squander lies. Plain dealing will be best for us both."

He was as changeable as June weather. Now it was his cue to look pleading. "The Indians called me by a name that meant bitter waters," he said hesitatingly. "But my baptismal records say Starling. I am telling you the truth, monsieur."

I wrote the name so that he could see. "You give me your word as a gentleman," I said, "that your name is Benjamin Starling."

He stopped a moment. "Can a yeoman swear himself a gentleman?" he asked. "I think not. I will be more explicit. I give you my oath as a truth-loving person that my name is Starling."

I put up the paper. "Thank you," I said. "And now, Monsieur Starling, we will say good-by. I am only a chance wayfarer here, and leave in an hour. I cannot wish you success, since you are my foe, but I can wish you a safe return to your own kind. I hope that we shall meet again. When I am dealing with a foe that I respect, I prefer him with his hands unbound. Good-day, monsieur."

But he was before me at the door. I saw that my news troubled him.

"You mean," he asked, "that you are leaving here for several days?"

I laid my hand on the latch. "No," I answered. "I leave for several months, monsieur."

"For months! Oh no!" he cried, and he drew back and looked at me. "Then I am like never to see you again," he said thoughtfully. "You have been kind to me." He suddenly thrust out his hand. "Monsieur, I will be

more generous than you. I wish you success."

But I would not take his hand on those terms. "Don't!" I said roughly. "You cannot wish me success. It will mean failure to you — to your people. No, we are foes, and let us wear our colors honestly. Again, I wish you good-day;" and, bowing, I raised the latch, and made my way out of the commandant's door.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE OTTAWA CAMP

CHANCE was disposed to be in a good humor. I had scarcely stepped into the crowd when I saw Pierre.

I went to him knowing that I should find opportunity for reproof, but should probably lack the will. For Pierre was my harlequin, and what man can easily censure his own amusements even when he sees their harm? Then there was more to make me lenient. The man's family had served my own for as many generations as the rooks had builded in our yews, and so, on one side at least, he inherited blind loyalty to my name. I say on one side, for his blood was mixed; his father had married a vagrant, a half-gypsy Irish girl who begged among the villages. It was the union of a stolid ox and a wildcat, and I had much amusement watching the two breeds fight for the mastery in the huge Pierre. The cat was quicker of wit, but the ox was of more use to me in the long run, so I tried to keep an excess of stimulants — whether of brandy or adventure — out of Pierre's way.

He was a figure for Bacchus when I found him,

and I pricked at him with my sword, and drove him to the water, where I saw him well immersed.

"Now for quick work," I admonished. "I must see the commandant, but only for a moment. You gather the men, and have the canoes in waiting. There will be no tobacco for you to-night, if you are not ready when I come."

He shook the water from his red locks, and wagged his head in much more docile fashion than I had expected. "My master cannot go too fast for me," he said, with a twist of his great protruding lip. "I have no liking for white meat broth myself."

He drew back like one who has hit a bull's-eye and waited for me to ask questions, but I thought that I knew my man, and laughed at his childishness.

"No more of that!" I said with perfunctory sternness. "What pot-house rabble of Indians have you been with that you should prattle of making broth of white men, and dare bring such speech to me as a jest! That is not talk for civilized men, and if you repeat it I shall send you back to France. You are more familiar with the savages than I like a man of mine to be. Remember that, Pierre. Now go."

But he lingered. "It is no pot-house story,"

he defended sulkily. "The Ottawas say they will go to war if the prisoner is not put in the pot before to-morrow morning. And what can the commandant do? The Ottawas are two thousand strong."

I knew, without comment, that he was telling me the truth, and I stood still. The din of the dancing and feasting was growing more and more uproarious, and the Indians were ripe for any insanity. I saw that the sun was already casting long shadows, and that the night would be on us before many hours. I looked at the garrison. Two hundred Frenchmen all told, and most of them half-hearted when it came to defending an Englishman and a foe! I turned to my man.

"You have been with an Ottawa girl, called Singing Arrow," I said. "Are you bringing me some woman's tale you learned from her?"

He squirmed like a clumsy puppy, but I could see his pride in my omniscience. "She is smarter than a man," he said vaguely.

And Pierre were the man, I thought that likely. "Take me to her," I commanded.

I expected to follow him among the revelers, but he turned his back on them, and led the way through a labyrinth of huts, a maze so winding that I judged him more sober than I had thought. When we found the girl, she was alone, and I

saw from her look that this was not the first visit Pierre had made.

He summoned her importantly, while I withdrew to a distance, that I might have her brought to me in form. I was intent and uneasy, but I had room in my heart for vain self-satisfaction that I knew something of the Ottawa speech. My proficiency in Indian dialects, for which the world praised me lightly, as it might commend the cut of my doublet, had cost me much drudgery and denial, and my moments of reward were rare.

Singing Arrow came forward, and curtsied as the priests had taught her. I was forced to approve my man's taste. Not that she was beautiful to my eyes, for brown women were never to my liking; but she had youth and neatness, and when she raised her eyes I saw that I might look for intelligence and daring. I motioned her to come nearer.

"Singing Arrow," I said, in somewhat halting Ottawa, "my man here tells me that your people are talking as if they were asleep, and were dreaming that they were all kings. Now when a dog barks at the moon, we do not stop to tremble for the safety of the moon, but we ask what is the matter with the dog. That is what I would ask of you. What do the Ottawas care what Monsieur de la Mothe-Cadillac,

the commandant, does with the English prisoner?"

She thought a moment, and plaited the folds of her beaver-skin skirt as I have seen many a white girl do. "I know of no dog," she said, with a slow upward glance that tried to gauge my temper. "And as for the moon, it shines alike on the grass and the tall trees, and I have seen no Frenchman yet who could reach up and pluck it from its place. But I have seen a chain that was once bright like silver grow dull and eaten with rust. A wise man will throw such a chain away, and ask for a new one."

I shrugged. "You have sharp eyes," I said, shrugging yet more, "if you can see rust on the covenant chain that binds the French to the Ottawas. Is that what you mean?"

She looked up with a flash of fun and diablerie such as I never thought to see in a savage face. "Then monsieur has seen it himself?"

Now this would not do; I would leave all gallantries to my subordinate. "This is idle talk," I said, as I lit my pipe, and prepared as if to go. "It is the clatter of water among stones that makes a great noise, but goes nowhere. I have seen many strange things in my life, but never a cat that could fight fair, nor a woman that could answer a direct question. Look at this now. I ask you about the Eng-

lish prisoner, and you talk to me of covenant chains."

She looked at me with impassive good humor, her hands busy with her wampum necklaces, and I saw, not only that I had failed to entrap her into losing her temper, but that I was dealing with a quick-witted woman of a race whose women were trained politicians. But, for reasons of her own, she chose to answer me fairly.

"The Frenchman is right," she said, with a second swift upward look to test the ice where she was venturing. "I was wrong to talk of the covenant between the French and my people, for the chain is too weak to bear even the weight of words. It is rusted till it is as useless as a band of grasses to bind a wild bull. But blood will cleanse rust. What can the French want with their enemy, the Englishman? Why should not the prisoner's blood be used to brighten the chain between the Ottawas and the French?"

Now this was plain language. I listened to the girl's speech, which was as gently cadenced as if she talked of flowers or summer pleasures, and thought that here was indeed snake's venom offered as a sweetmeat. But why did she warn me? I had a flash of sense. I went to her, and compelled her to stop playing with her necklaces, and raise her eyes to mine.

"Answer me, Singing Arrow," I commanded. "You are repeating what was said in council, but you do not agree with it. You would like to save the prisoner. Look at me again. Am I right?"

I could as well have held an eel. She slipped from my hands, and ran back to her lodge. "So!" she cried, as she lifted the mat before her door. "So it is not the dog alone that smells at its food before it will eat. Why stay here? I have given you what you came to find. Take it." And with a look at Pierre she disappeared.

Pierre gave a great bellow of laughter. "I will catch her," he volunteered, and made a plunge in the direction of the lodge; but I caught him by the hood of his blanket coat, and let his own impetus choke him.

"Now look you, Pierre Boudin," I said, "if you cross the door of that lodge on any errand, — on any errand, mind you, — you are no longer man of mine. I mean that; you are no longer man of mine. Now begone. Gather the men, go to the canoes, and wait there till I come. I may come soon; I may not come till morning."

Pierre was still swelling. "As the master wishes," he said, with his eyes down; but I thought that he hesitated, and I called him to me.

"Pierre," I said, "do you want to be sent back to Montreal, and have François Labarthe put in your place?"

The giant looked up to see how much I was in earnest, and, as I returned his look, all his bravado oozed away. It does not seem quite the part of a man to cow a subordinate till he looks at you with the eyes of a whipped hound; but it was the only method to use with Pierre, and I went away satisfied.

I turned my steps toward the main camp of Ottawas, and there I idled for an hour. The braves were good-humored with me, for I was a trader, not an officer, and their noses were keen for the brandy that I might have for barter. So that I was free to watch them at their gambling, or dip my ladle in their kettles if I willed. All this was good, but it went no further. With all my artifices, I could not make my way into the great circle around the camp fire, and I grew sore with my incapacity, for I saw that Longuant, the most powerful chief of the Ottawas, was speaking. I picked up a bone and threw it among the dogs with an oath for my own slowness.

The bone was greasy, and I took out my handkerchief, but before I could use it to wipe my hands, a young squaw pushed her way up to me, and offered her long black hair as a napkin.

She threw the oily length across my arm, and flattered me in fluent Ottawa.

Then I forgot myself. The body frequently plays traitor in emergencies, and my repugnance conquered me so that I pushed her away before I had time to think. Then I knew that I must make amends.

"The beauty of your hair is like the black ice with the moon on it," I said in Ottawa. "You must not soil it."

She giggled with pleasure to hear me use her own tongue, and would have come close to me again, but I motioned her away.

"Stay there, and catch this," I called, and I tossed her a small coin.

For all her squat figure and her broad, dull face, she was quick of action as a weasel. She put her hands behind her, and, thrusting her head forward, caught the coin in her teeth. It was well done; so well that I said "Brava," and the braves around me gave approving grunts.

"Look at the stupid Frenchman!" I heard a brave say. "For all his red coat, and his manners, he cannot catch as well as a squaw."

I pointed my finger at him, and twirled my mustaches as if I were playing villain in a comedy. "A Frenchman does not stoop to catch money," I vaunted, with my arm akimbo.

"Money is for slaves and women. Give the Frenchman a spear, a man's weapon, and then see if he can be beaten at throwing by a squaw."

There was a laugh at this, and the squaw to whom I had thrown the coin seized a sturgeon spear that leaned against a kettle, and hurled it at me. I turned my back, and caught it over my shoulder. There was a hush among the braves for a moment, then a low growl of applause. "Let him do it again," several voices cried.

I did it again, and yet again, in varying ways. The squaw threw well, and caught better, but she was no match for my longer reach and better training. Still we kept the spear hurtling. With each throw I backed a pace or two toward the council fire, and the crowd made way for me.

"This is enough," I cried at length. "Have you no men among you who can throw better than your women?"

A dozen braves, each clamoring, leaped forward, but before I could select one of them, a young Huron elbowed his way into the midst of them and placed himself before me.

"Try your skill with me," he cried, striking his breast, and though he spoke a broken mixture of Huron and Ottawa, his air was so

rhetorical that the Ottawas, always keen for a dramatic moment, stopped to listen.

I balanced the spear in my hand. "I am trying my skill with the Ottawas," I said. "Since when has Pemaou, the Huron, forsaken his own camp?"

The Huron drew back. He was a son of that adroit traitor, the Baron, and what his presence in this camp meant, I could only surmise. But that he was of the Baron's blood was enough for me, and I was prepared to dislike him without searching for excuse. He, on his part, looked equally unfriendly. He resented my recognition, and taking his war spear from his belt he sent it at me with a vicious fling.

This heated my blood. I caught the spear, and tested it across my knee. It was pliant but tough, and wickedly barbed, — a weapon for a man to respect. "So you wanted the color of my blood," I called angrily. "You have a good spear; all that was lacking was a man to aim it;" and with a contemptuous laugh I tossed the spear back to his hand.

Now this was mere childishness, and I knew it, and hoped, with shame for my own lack of sense, that Pemaou would not accept my covert challenge, and that the matter would end there. But Pemaou had purposes of his own. He

looked at the spear for a moment, then sent it spinning toward my head. "On guard!" he cried in my own tongue, and I remembered that he had spent some time among the French at Montreal.

I caught the spear, and cursed myself for a fool. The Indians again gave tongue to their approval, and gathered in a ring, leaving the space between Pemaou and myself clear. All was ready for the game to proceed. I hesitated a moment, and the Ottawas laughed, while Pemaou looked disdainful.

All animals are braggarts, from the cock in the barnyard to the moose when he hears his rival, and man is not much better. I pricked the spear point against my hand, and looked at it critically.

"It is as dull as the Huron's wits," I scoffed, "but we will do the best that we can with it;" and stepping back several feet nearer the council fire, I put the weapon into play.

I have been in weightier occasions than the one that followed, but never in one that I can remember in more detail. In all lives there are moments that memory paints in bright, crude colors, like pictures in a child's book, and so this scene looks to me now. I can see the crowding Ottawas, their bodies painted red and black, their nose pendants — a pebble hung on a deer-

sinew — swinging against their greasy lips as they shouted plaudits or derision. But best I can see Pemaou, dancing between me and the sun like some grotesque dream fantasy. He was in full war bravery, his body painted red, barred with white stripes to imitate the lacing on our uniforms, and his hair feather-decked till he towered in height like a fir tree. I say that he was grotesque, but at the time I did not think of his appearance; I thought only that here was a man who was my mate in cunning, and who wished me ill.

This was no squaw's game, for each cast was made with force and method. We both threw warily, and the spear whistled to and fro as regularly as a weaver's shuttle. I backed my way toward the council fire until I could hear Longuant distinctly, then I prayed my faculties to serve me well, and stood my ground. My mind was on the rack. I could not, for the briefest instant, release the tension of my thought as to the game before me, yet I missed no sound from the group around the fire. The low, red sun dazzled my eyes, and I waited, with each throw from the Huron, for one that should be aimed with deadlier intent.

For I realized that Pemaou was not doing his best, and, since I had seen hate in his eyes, this clemency troubled me. I wondered if he were a

decoy, and if some one were coming upon me from the rear, and I stopped and stared at him with defiance, only to see that he was looking, not at me, nor at the attentive audience around us, but over my head at the council fire.

Then, indeed, the truth clapped me in the face, and I could have laughed aloud to think what a puppet I had been, just when I was comforting my vanity with my own shrewdness. Of course, Pemaou would spare me, and so prolong the game. As the son of the leader of the Hurons, he had more to learn from Longuant's speech than I. We were playing with the same cards, but his stakes were the larger. I suddenly realized that I was enjoying myself more than in a long time.

But the test was to come. When Pemaou had heard all he wished, he would aim the spear at my throat, and so, though I threw negligently, I watched like a starved cat. I heard the council agree upon a decisive measure, and I knew that the Huron's moment had arrived. He seized it. His spear whistled at me like a bullet, but my muscles were braced and waiting. I caught the weapon, and held it, though the wood ate into my palms. The savages told the Huron in a derisive roar that the Frenchman was the better man.

And now it was my turn. So far I had thrown

fair, without twist or trickery, but I knew one turn of the wrist that could do cruel work. Should I use it? Pemaou had tried to murder me. I looked at his red-and-white body, and reptile eyes, and hate rushed to my brain like liquor. I took the spear and snapped it.

"Take your plaything!" I cried, and I tossed the fragments in his face. "Learn to use it if you care for a whole skin, for I promise you that we shall meet again." And turning my back on him, I strode out of the Ottawa camp the richer by some information, and one foe.

CHAPTER V

A DECISION

I FOUND Cadillac in his private room at the fort, and said to myself that he looked like a man stripped for running. Not that his apparel had altered since I had met him swaggering upon the beach the day before, but his bearing had changed. He had dropped superfluities, and was hardened and sinewed for action.

I expected him to rate me for my tardiness in reporting my interview with the Englishman, but, instead, he greeted me with so much eagerness that I saw that some of my news must have run before.

"What do you know?" I cried.

He looked at the crowd swarming outside the window. "That we are in a hornets' nest," he said, with a wry smile. "But never mind that now. We must talk rapidly. I have been waiting for you. I could not act till I learned what you had done."

I bowed my regrets. "I was delayed. I saw the Englishman, and" —

He cut me short. "Never mind the English-

man," he cried, with a wave of his impatient hand. "Tell me of the Ottawa camp. You have been there an hour. I hear that you danced where they danced, and shared dog-meat and jest alike. In faith, Montlivet, I have a good will to keep you here in irons if I can do it in no gentler way. But what did Longuant say at the council fire?"

I made sure that we were alone, and dropped into a chair. My muscles were complaining, yet I knew that I had but begun my day's work. "It was a long council," I said, "and all the old men were there. Longuant was leader, but he was but one of many. The Ottawas are much stirred."

"About the prisoner?"

I shook my head. "The prisoner is the excuse, — the touchstone. The real matter goes deep. You have not blinded these people. They know that England and France are at war, but they know, too, that peace may be declared any day. They know that the Baron has made an underground treaty with the English and the Iroquois, and they realize that the Iroquois may attack this place at any time with half the band of Hurons at their back. They have no illusions as to what such an attack would mean. They know that the French would make terms and be spared, but that the Ottawas

and the loyal Hurons would be butchered. They are far-sighted."

Cadillac nodded heavily. "So they think that we would desert them, and hand them over to the Iroquois? We must reassure them."

I rapped on the table. "We did desert them once," I reminded him. "They know how we abandoned the refugee Hurons at Quebec, and they hold our word lightly. It shames us to say this, but we must see matters as they are. No, the Ottawas do not trust us, but they trust the English less. It is a choice of evils. But they are shrewd enough to see that their greatest peril lies in a truce between ourselves and the English. Then they would indeed be between two stools. Now, they see that there are two paths open."

Cadillac was breathing heavily. "You mean" — he asked.

I spoke slowly. "I mean," I said, "that they must either go over to the English themselves, or succeed in embroiling us with the English."

"And they chose?"

"They did not choose. They temporized. They see the advantages of a union with the English. A better beaver market, and plenty of brandy. It goes hard with them that we are frugal with our muskets, while the English keep

the Iroquois well armed. Longuant says, and justly, that it is difficult to kill men with clubs. On the other hand they like us, and find the English abhorrent. So they have virtually agreed to leave the casting vote with you. They will come after sundown and demand that the prisoner be given them for torture. If you agree, they will feel that you have declared your position against the English; if you refuse" — I broke off, and leaned back in the chair. I had not realized, till my own voice stated it, how black a case we had in hand.

We sat in silence for a time. Cadillac scowled and beat his palm upon his knee as a flail beats grain, and I knew he needed no words of mine. I thought that he was going over his defenses in his mind, and I began to calculate how many rounds of shot I had in my canoes, and to hope that my men would not prove cravens. I knew, without argument with myself, that the beaver lands did not need me half as much as I was needed here.

At length Cadillac looked up. "Do you think the prisoner is a spy?" he asked.

I had dreaded this question. "I am afraid so, but judge of him yourself. He speaks French."

Cadillac half rose. "He speaks French? Yet he is an Englishman?"

I nodded. "Undoubtedly an Englishman."

"And you made nothing of him?"

I could only shake my head. "Nothing. He tells the story that I should tell if I were lying, — yet he may be telling the truth. He is a bundle of inconsistencies; that may be nature or art. He may be a hot-headed youth, who knows nothing beyond his own bitterness over his capture, or he may be a clever actor. I do not know."

Cadillac gave a long breath that was near a sigh. "Poor soul!" he said unexpectedly. "Well, spy or otherwise, it matters little for the few hours remaining."

I caught his arm across the table. "Cadillac!" I cried, with an oath. "You would not do that!"

He shook off my hand, and looked at me with more regret than anger. "I am the rat in the trap," he said simply. "What did you expect me to do?"

I rose. "Do you mean," I cried, my voice rasping, "that you will not attempt a defense? that you will hand a man, a white man, over to those fiends of hell? Good God, man, you are worse than the Iroquois!"

He came over, and seized my arm. "I could run you through for that speech," he said, his teeth grating. "Are you a child, that you can-

not look beyond the moment? Suppose I defy the Ottawas. Then I must call on the Baron to help me, since it was his men who brought the prisoner to camp. Why, man, are you crazed? Look at the situation. Kondiaronk, the Huron, will reason as the Ottawas have done, and throw his forces on their side. I should be left with only the Baron to back me, — the Baron, who has been whetting his knife for my throat for the last year. Why, this is what he wants; this is why he brought the prisoner here! Would you have me walk into his trap? Would you have me sacrifice my men, this garrison, why, this country even, to save the life of one puny Englishman, who is probably himself a spy?" He stopped a moment. "Why, man, you sicken me!" he cried, and he slashed at me with his sword as if I were a reptile.

I took my own sword, and laid it on the table. "I am a fool," I said, not for the first time that day. "But how will Frontenac look at your handing a white man over to torture?"

Cadillac put up his sword. "My orders are plain," he said, tapping a sheaf of papers on his desk. "They came in the last packet. I am to treat all prisoners in the Indian manner. As you say, the Indians have come to think us chicken-hearted. We must give them more than words if we are to hold them as allies."

I seized sword and hat. "You are a good servant," I said. "I wish you joy of your obedience," and I plunged toward the door.

But an orderly stopped me on the threshold. "Is Monsieur de la Mothe-Cadillac within?" he asked. "The Baron desires an audience with him."

Cadillac pushed up behind me. "I am here," he called to the orderly. "Tell the Baron that I will see him when the sun touches the waterline." Then he pulled me back into the room. "How much do you think the Baron knows?" he demanded.

I felt shame for my forgetfulness. "Pemaou was in the Ottawa camp," I said, and I told him what had happened.

Cadillac's face hardened. "Then they have sent to demand the prisoner," he pondered moodily. "I had hoped for a few hours' respite. There might have been some way for the prisoner to escape."

I had been walking the floor, grinding my mailed heels into the pine wood. "Escape!" I cried at him. "Escape! To starve or be eaten by wolves! The torture of the Ottawas were kinder. Now it is your turn to play the child. Escape? Yes, but not alone. Go, go, monsieur! Go and meet the Baron. Go before I change my mind. Tell the Baron he

can have the prisoner. Then go to Longuant, and make what terms you will with him. Make any concessions. Feather your nest while you can. I want some one to win at this, since I must lose. I will take the prisoner west with me."

Cadillac seized me. "Montlivet, you mean this?" he demanded. His grip ate into my arm.

I reached up, and unclasped his fingers. "Unhand me!" I grumbled. "I must be on my way."

But he paid no heed. "You mean this?" he reiterated, taking a fresh grip. "The prisoner will hamper you."

I tore my arm away. "Hamper me!" I jerked out. "He will clog me, manacle me! But it is the only thing to do. Now go, while this mood holds with me. Five minutes hence I may not see things in this way. Go! I will arrange the escape. You, as commandant, must not connive with me at that. Go to the Indians, and make your terms. If you can hold them off till moonrise, I promise you the prisoner shall be gone."

But Cadillac would not hasten. He gave me the long estimating glance that I had seen him use once before. "Montlivet," he said, with his arm across my shoulder, "you are doing a

great thing; a great thing for France. No man could serve his country more fully than you are doing at this moment. It is an obscure deed, but a momentous one. No one can tell what you may be doing for the empire by helping us through this crisis."

But I was in no mood for heroics. "I am not doing this for France," I cried irritably. "I live to serve France, yes; but I want to serve her in my own way. Not to have this millstone tied around my neck, whether I will or no. Don't think for a moment that I do this because I wish."

Cadillac removed his arm and looked at me. "Then you do it from liking for the Englishman?"

I should have had the grace to laugh at this, but now it was the torch to the magazine. "Like him! No!" I shouted, with an oath. "He is bitter of tongue, and, I think, a spy. He is obnoxious to me. No, I am doing this because I am, what the Ottawas call us all, — chicken-hearted!" and sick with myself and what I had undertaken, I flung out of the door.

CHAPTER VI

DAME OPPORTUNITY

THE first thing to do was to see the Englishman. For the third time in twenty-four hours I went to the commandant's quarters.

The prisoner was at the window when I entered, and again I caught his look of keen intelligence; a look which he apparently tried to veil as his eyes met mine. That bred suspicion in me. Yet I could not mistake the welcome with which he greeted me.

"I am gratified to see you again, monsieur." Now it was a civil phrase, and well spoken, but it annoyed me. I could not understand his change of look, and I dislike complexities. What was the man concealing that he should drop his eyes before me. In spite of the seriousness of our joint state, I felt much inclination to take time, then and there, to box his ears, and tell him to be more forthright. My annoyance made it easier for me to come without phrases to the meat of the matter. I pressed him to a chair, and stood over him.

"You looked out of the window, Monsieur Starling. What did you learn?"

He glanced upward. "The Indians are excited. Am I the cause?"

"Yes, monsieur."

His glance fell. "They want me — for torture," he said, with steadiness I could not but commend. Then he turned suddenly. "Can your commandant protect me?"

Now this was unexpected. I had intended to lead up to this situation gradually, and the question caught me unguarded. The prisoner was looking me full in the face, and he read there what I had hoped to hide.

"I understand," he said.

I have been with many men when they heard their death sentence, and those who take it as this man did, with spirit and knowledge, rob me of my hold on myself, so that I show emotion of which I am ashamed. I turned away. "Wait, wait, monsieur, I have not said all!" I cried. "There is still one chance for you."

He shook his head. "Small chance for me with that swarm outside. Well, what must come, will come." He was white, and his eyes grew even more sombre; but, though his blood might play him traitor, his will was unshaken. I saw that. I saw, too, that his manner had lost all bravado. He suddenly came to me, and laid his hand on my arm. "I am glad,

monsieur, that it was you who came to tell me. It is much easier to hear it from you. All day you have been thoughtful for me; for me, a stranger and an enemy. I wish that my blessing might bring you happiness, monsieur." And before I could check him, he raised my hand to his lips.

I was greatly disturbed. "Stop! Stop! Stop!" I expostulated, too much stirred to think what I was saying. "This is not the end. You are to go west with me."

He drew away. "With you? Who are you? What is the west? You said — you said that I had to die."

I felt unsteady, and ill at ease. "Let us discuss this like sane men!" I exclaimed, angry at myself. "You jump at conclusions. That is a woman's foible. Who am I? A trader, Armand de Montlivet, from Montreal. I am going west for peltries. It will be a hard trip, and you will suffer; but it is your only chance. I will get you to the canoe in some fashion soon after dusk. I have not made my plans. I must reconnoitre. Hold yourself ready to do what I ask."

Still he drew away. "I shall be a burden. Tell me the truth, shall I be a burden?"

"Yes."

He did not look angered. Indeed, his eyes

softened till I thought him near tears. "And you will do this for me! Run all this risk! And yet you never saw me before to-day!" He touched his hand to mine.

Somehow this again annoyed me. The man was concealing something from me, yet affected to be moved to open emotion by his gratitude. I was not at the bottom of him yet. I removed his hand.

"Monsieur, you forget," I corrected. "You said we were foes, and we are. I never embraced an Englishman, and I shall not begin now — now that our nations are at war. You may be a spy."

"You think me a spy!"

I sighed from exasperation, and pointed to the window. "Monsieur Starling, wake up to this situation. What does it matter what you are, or what I think? We waste time. Say that you will follow me, and I shall go and make my plans."

But still he looked at me. "Then you encumber yourself with me from abstract duty. Personally you distrust me."

The truth seemed best. I bowed.

He thought this over. "Then I refuse to go," he decided quietly. "I refuse." And he bowed toward the door to put a period to our interview.

But here my patience broke. I took him

by the arm, and held him ungently. "Words! Words! Words!" I mocked at him. "What would you have me say? That I love you? In faith, I don't. You irritate me; annoy me. But save you I will, if only for my peace of mind. Look at me. Look at me, I say."

He obeyed. All his hard nonchalance had returned.

"Do you trust me?" I demanded.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then you will come with me?"

"No, monsieur."

This was madness — and it took time. "Indeed you will come," I said between my teeth. "And that without more words. Good-by."

But he caught my sleeve. "Then you take me against my will."

I brushed him away. "And against mine, too, if you balk my wishes at every turn. But I will take you. It is the only chance you have, and if you are mad enough to refuse it, I must force it on you. Remember, I shall use force. Now stay by the window, and await my signal. I shall come when I can."

He followed to the door. "You will not need to use force with me, monsieur," he said soberly. "If you insist on taking me, I shall follow your directions, and use what wit I can. But I cannot thank you, for I cannot feel grateful. You

give under protest, and I accept in the same way. It is a forced companionship. I do not wish to die; but, after all, it will soon be over, and life has not been sweet. I would rather risk what meets me here than take help from you, now that I see you give it grudgingly."

This chilled me, and excuses pressed hot on my tongue. Yet it was unwise to protest. Why should I wish his gratitude? It would hamper us both. I had no desire to bind him to me with obligations. I felt shame for my coldness; but, for once, my head ruled, and I let the situation stand.

"You are a brave man, monsieur," I said inconsequently. "I know that you will bear your share to-night."

He laid his hand on the door, and searched me with his sad eyes. "One last word," he said, "and then I shall bury this for aye. Monsieur, if I bring you misfortune, I ask you to remember — to remember from now on — that you took me against my will."

For all my impatience, I had some effort not to smile. He would be a burden, he might be a nuisance, but he could hardly be a misfortune. He had a weighty sense of his importance, to use so large a term. But I would not ridicule him. "I promise," I said.

He held out his hand. "Say that again with

your hand in mine. Promise me that, whatever disaster I bring you, you will remember that I came against my will."

Somehow that sobered me. "I promise," I repeated, and touching his hand, and again bidding him be on the watch, I went away.

I had no plans. My mind was cloudy as muddy water, and I sauntered around the camp looking important and weighty with calculation, but feeling resourceless and slow. Then I bethought me of Singing Arrow.

I shouldered my way to her lodge with speed that made me a target for scantily hidden laughter. But I could not find her. Lodge and fire were alike deserted. I asked questions, but was met by shrugs. My eagerness had been unwise. I had sought too openly and brusquely, and the Ottawas suspected my zeal of being official rather than personal. I saw myself in their eyes as an officer of the law, and knew that I had closed one door in my own face. I told myself contemptuously that I had made so many blunders in that one day that I must, by this time, have exhausted the list, and that I would soon stumble on the right road as the only one left.

And so it proved. For I went to my canoes, and there, perched bird-wise on my cargo, and flinging jests and laughter at Pierre and the men, sat Singing Arrow.

It was what I most wanted, and so relieved was I at finding it, that I could not forbear a word of reproof.

"I told you to keep away from Singing Arrow!" I stormed at Pierre, like the mother who stops to shake her recovered child before she cries over it.

Pierre grinned shamefacedly, but Singing Arrow smiled like May sunlight.

"Has monsieur been looking for me?" she asked. "He carries the wet red clay that lies in front of my wigwam," and she pointed a curving finger at my boots.

I could have embraced her. If I had no wit, she had it and to spare. I made up my mind, then and there, to trust her. It was a mad chance, but a good gamester likes a dangerous throw.

"Come here, Singing Arrow," I commanded, and I would have led her down the beach out of earshot.

She followed but a step or two, then halted, balancing herself on one foot like a meditative crane. "I want sunset-head to go too," she insisted, darting her covert bird-glance at Pierre, and when I would have objected, I saw her mouth pinch together, and I remembered that no Indian will submit to force. So I let her have her will.

We held short council: Pierre the peasant, Singing Arrow the squaw, and I, the Seignior de Montlivet. We mingled suggestions and advice, and struck a balance. The sunset flamed in the woods behind us, and I knew that the moon rose early. I could have used a knife upon Pierre for the time it took me to convince him that our canoes could carry one man more. Heretofore my nod had been enough to bring him to my heels, but now he thought his head in danger, so he fought with me like an animal or an equal. The equal I would not tolerate, and the animal I cowed in brute fashion. Then I sent Singing Arrow to do her work, and I went to the Englishman.

The Englishman saw me from the window, and was at the door before I could lift the latch. Yet his eagerness did not trip him into carelessness, and so long as the guards could see, he greeted me with a hostile stare.

I pushed him within, and closed the door. "Have you seen any one?" I asked.

"Only the guard with my supper."

I drew a freer breath. "Good tidings. Then Cadillac has succeeded in holding off the Indians until moonrise."

He glanced out at the dusk. "That is not long," he said dispassionately.

I put out my hand. Somehow this youth

could move me curiously by his calmness, although I was no stranger to brave men.

"The time is terribly short," I agreed, "but we will make it suffice. And we need not haste. We can do nothing till it is a little darker, then we shall move swiftly. A young squaw, Singing Arrow, will be here in a few minutes. You are to escape in her dress."

He wasted no time in comment. "Am I dark enough?" he demurred. "My neck, where I am not sunburned, is very white."

I had thought of this, and had warned Singing Arrow. "There is no opportunity to stain your skin," I said, "so we must trust to the dark, and a blanket wrapping. The Indian will wear leggings, skirt and blouse of skin, so you will be fairly covered. The hands and hair are the weak points. You will have to keep them in the blanket."

He hesitated. "You can trust this girl?" he asked slowly.

Now why should he ask what he knew I could not answer? "Can you trust me — or I you, for the matter of that?" I jerked out with a frown. "This is an outlaw's land, and the wise man trusts no one except under compulsion. I would not trust Singing Arrow for a moment if I could help myself, but she is our only hope, so I trust her implicitly. I advise you to do the

same. Half measures are folly. If you try to be cautious in your dealings with her, you will tie her hands so that the whole thing will fall through. If she betrays us — well, you are in no worse estate than now, and we will still have my sword and my men to depend on. But that is a slender hope, and we will save it for a last resort. Now we will hazard everything on this plan."

I had made my long speech nervously, knowing, in my heart, that what I asked the man to do would take more courage of soul than one would expect to find in his slender frame. For I might be throwing him over to fiendish torment. The Indian women were cruel as weasels, and more ingenious in their trap-setting than the men. It cooled my blood to think what Singing Arrow's friendliness might really mean.

The prisoner heard me without flinching. "But what is Singing Arrow's motive?" he asked, with his mournful eyes full on my own. "We cannot read men's hearts, but, after all, there are but few springs that rule their action. You know that I will be loyal to you to save my head, to which, though it has served me badly, I yet cling. I know that you will be loyal to me because I see that God gave you a softness of heart which your brain tells you is unwise. But what string pulls this Indian that she should be

a traitor to her people? If you will give me a hint, I will play upon it as best I can."

I could only shrug. "It may be my man, Pierre," I hazarded. "He is red as a flamingo, and a fool into the bargain; but he has shoulders like an ox, so the women want him. I can see no other motive. Will you trust to that, monsieur?"

He looked back at me with the flicker of a smile. "It is sufficient."

I do not like smiles that I cannot understand, so I changed the subject. "The plan is simple, monsieur," I said briskly. "Singing Arrow will come to the window, and you are to make love to her. After a time — not too long — you are to beguile her inside. I think the guards will be complaisant, if you play your part well. Be as debonair as possible. A soldier is always tempted to be lenient to a jaunty foe."

The prisoner nodded. "And you will meet me?"

"Outside in the camp. I shall stand near a fire, so that you can find me at once. Remember, monsieur, that you are Singing Arrow, and that it will be your cue to follow me, and mine to shrug you away."

The Englishman drew a long breath. "I am ready, monsieur," he said, with a little squaring of the shoulders, and I saw that, mortal danger

that he was in, his spirit yet responded to the touch of comedy in the game.

I saluted him with a laugh of my own. "Then I will go, monsieur. Go into the next room to change your clothing, or the guard may come in and find you. One thing more. Remember you have overpowered Singing Arrow, and taken your disguise by force. It may be well to lock her in that inside room before you leave; but do as you like. I leave details to you."

He made acknowledgment with a sweeping bow. "I will be a monster of cruelty," he promised, and he pulled at imaginary mustachios like a child at play.

Now it may be well to commend nonchalance, but there are bounds that should not be passed. Had this man no reverence toward the mystery of his own life that he jested on the edge of it? I had rather have seen him with a rosary in his hand than with defiance on his lips.

"Is life all bitterness and sharp-edged laughter with you, monsieur?" I asked bluntly. "This may be our last talk. It is hardly a seemly one. If you have messages to send that will not compromise you, I will try and get them through — in case our plans fail."

The prisoner eyed me oddly. "And in case you still live, monsieur," he corrected. "You show much solicitude that I meet my end deco-

rously, yet I cannot see that you display any dolor over your own condition. Why should I have less fortitude? You are like a man who cares not for religion for himself, yet insists upon it for children and for his womenkind, — for his inferiors in general. Why should you feel that I need so much prompting?" His voice suddenly hardened. "Tell me. Is it my youth that makes you feel yourself my mentor, or have I failed you in any way? Answer." And he gave the stamp of the foot that I had heard once before.

How could I answer but with laughter? "You are a leopard, and a lamb, and a bantam cock all in one," I jeered at him. "No wonder that I feel you need a priest to shrive you;" and I laughed again, and would not notice the hurt shining of his eyes as I went away.

CHAPTER VII

THE BEGINNING

I HAD not vaunted idly when I told the prisoner that our plans were ready. I had scarcely dropped the latch of the commandant's door when I saw Singing Arrow sauntering near.

She was graceful in her finery. Even a white man might commend. Her skin garments looked soft and clean, and draped her cunningly. In the dusk and the firelight with the bright blanket falling from her hair, she looked so winning that I thought the guards could find excuse if the prisoner loitered at the window.

And loiter he did. I sauntered and watched while the prisoner and Singing Arrow threw glances that proved them no tyros in the game of love and life. The comedy was pleasing, and I did not wonder that the guards tilted their heads to one side, and looked on with grins. Singing Arrow bridled, and drew away and then drew near. All was going as we planned, till Pemaou and a band of his Hurons came around the corner of the house.

I had done Pemaou the justice to hate him when I first saw him. And one does not hate

an inferior. He had as keen a mind as I have ever known, and he was not hampered by any of the scruples and decencies that interfere with a white man. So he was my superior in resource. I knew, as I saw him look at me now, that my share in the game was over. He had seen me listening to Longuant. Where had my wits been lagging that I had not foreseen that he would have spies watching me, and would trace some connection between the prisoner and myself? Well, there was nothing left me but to stroll away. I did not dare go in the direction of the canoes; it would be unwise to seek Cadillac; so I turned boldly to the Ottawa camp. Hardly knowing what I planned, I asked for Longuant.

Somewhat to my surprise, the Ottawas listened with respect. I had apparently won some reputation among them, and without demur they took me to the chief.

Longuant was squatting before his lodge. A piece of wood was laid across his lap, and he was chopping rank tobacco with a scalping knife. He smelled of oil, and smoke, and half-cured hides; yet he met me as a ruler meets an ambassador. As I stumbled after him into his dark lodge, I saw that he was preparing to greet me with all the silence and circumlocution of a state messenger. I had no time for that, —

though it gratified me. I tramped my way through all ceremony and plunged at my point.

"I am no envoy," I began, shaking my head in refusal of the proffered seat upon the mat beside him. "I am only a voice. A bird that calls 'beware' from the branches, and then flits away. Why watch the old wolf, and let the cub play free? Would you make yourself a laughing-stock among your people, by letting the Englishman escape into the Baron's hands? Pemaou, son of the Baron, stands with his followers outside the Englishman's window. What does he seek? I am no Ottawa. I am a free man, bound to no clan, and to no covenant, and friend to the Ottawas and Hurons alike. But I do not like to see a wise man tricked by a boy. I have spoken."

Longuant rose. "My brother's voice speaks the truth," he said, gathering his robes to leave me. "My brother sent his words, even as he flung his spear at Pemaou, straight at the mark. Only one word goes astray. My brother is not the free man he vaunts himself. He is tied by hate;" and pushing out his lip till his huge nose pendant stood at a right angle, he went on his way to be my willing, but entirely unhoodwinked agent.

I went to my canoes, stumbling a little, for I was tired. It was dark now, and the fires

glowed brazenly, so that the Indians showed like dancing silhouettes. The sky was cloudless, and to the east lay a band of uncertain light that meant the rising moon. This was the time that I had planned to use in action, and the knowledge that I was powerless to accomplish anything myself made me so irritable that I could not bear to speak even to Pierre and the men. I sent them to a distance, and sat down on the sand so torn and frayed by anxiety that I was like a sick man.

And here, after long minutes, Singing Arrow found me. She came running down the beach, slipping on the rolling pebbles, and careless either of her grace, or of the noise she made.

"And you sit here doing nothing!" she cried, quite as a white girl might have done.

I pushed her down on the sand. "Stop!" I said. "I knew you would seek me here. Now answer briefly. Pemaou and his men would not let you get near the window?"

"No."

"They had seen you with me," I explained. "I feared it. Did Longuant and his men come?"

"Like bees," she answered, with a fling of her arms. "They are everywhere. We can do nothing;" and she dropped her head in her arms and cried.

Now what indeed could be her motive? "Never mind, Singing Arrow," I said experimentally. "What is it to you, after all?"

She wriggled her head to throw me a wrathful look. "I always win at a game," she mumbled.

She was as hard to read as a purring cat, but that did not matter. "We've not lost yet," I said, as slowly and coolly as if I did not see the disk of the moon looking at me. "I sent Longuant there. I was sure that Pemaou would keep you away, and I am playing for time. So long as the Ottawas and Hurons are squabbling with one another, Cadillac will not deliver the prisoner. But we must get them farther away. Singing Arrow, I have brandy in my cargo. I have drawn off two large flasks. Could you carry them to the other end of the camp, and send word among the braves?"

Now this was a contemptible thing to suggest; but any one who stoops, as I was letting myself do, to use a cat's-paw to work out his ends will surely soil his fingers. The sword is the clean weapon. I felt that even this Indian would look at me with disdain, but she did not. She thought a moment, then wagged her head in assent.

"But I promised Father Carheil not to drink any brandy myself," she added defiantly, as

if she feared I might protest, and I felt myself as low as the hound that I had kicked that day because it would have stolen a child's sagamité.

"Make haste!" I cried, in a fury with myself, and with the speeding time. "Tell the prisoner to saunter away from the door, to pass the largest fire, and then to go straight through the old maize field toward the timber. I will be waiting there."

"I can do it," she vaunted, and she gathered the brandy under her blanket, and ran like a quail, while I went to my red-topped giant.

"Pierre Boudin," I cried, with my hand on his collar, "if we get back to this place alive, you are to marry that Ottawa girl; to marry her fairly with priest and book. Remember that."

My man turned a complacent eye. "If the master wishes," he said dutifully. Then he gave a fat chuckle. "I promised to marry her when we came back if she would save the Englishman, — but then I thought that we should go home the other way."

Why try to teach decency to a barnyard brood! I dusted my fingers free from the soil of him. "I will marry her to you, if only to see her flout you," I promised vengefully. "Now to the canoes, and have your paddles ready." I had no smile for him, though he sought it, as I walked away.

The moon had swung free of the horizon, and cabins and trees stood out as if made of white cardboard. The night was chilly, and as I crept along the edge of the maize field, I caught my numbed toes on the stiffened clods of earth turned up by last year's plowing. Yet I moved silently, and by keeping in the shadow of blackened stumps and withered maize stalks, I reached bow-shot of the commandant's door.

Truly one part of my plan had succeeded. The house was the centre of an ant-like swarm skurrying here and there, apparently without method, but with a jerkiness of movement that suggested attack and recoil. I could distinguish the nose pendants of the Ottawas and the bristling crests of the Hurons. It was a crew with choice potentialities for mischief. Cadillac was justified in feeling that his scalp sat but unsteadily upon his head.

I had given Singing Arrow fifteen minutes to hide her brandy and send word to the braves, and I counted off the time to myself, trying to numb my anxiety. But among savages news runs underground as well as over, and I had scarcely covered half the space that I had set for myself before the crowd began to disappear. It slipped away like water between the fingers, and in a moment there remained only the guards, Pemaou, and a few Ottawas. The guards,

relieved from immediate anxiety of a riot, leaned listlessly on their muskets, the Ottawas would not interfere with a girl of their own tribe, and Pemaou could not watch all quarters at once. Now was certainly the time to act; but where was Singing Arrow? My inaction pressed on me like a hideous weight. It seemed days instead of hours that I had sat like a crone by her distaff and let others do my work — or fail to do it. Why was Singing Arrow so slow to come?

I thought that I had not shifted my gaze from the house for more than an instant; but now, as I watched the door, I learned, and not for the first time, that a white man should have a score of eyes instead of two when it comes to watching an Indian. For the commandant's door suddenly opened, and out came a blanket-draped, skin-clad figure. My muscles stiffened. It was the Englishman. Singing Arrow had brought him the clothing, and I had not seen.

So the moment had come. I gripped my sword as one turns instinctively to the friend loved best. Would the prisoner act his part? So keen was my anxiety, that I felt my spirit leap out to stand by his side, and I shut my teeth upon the cry of encouragement that welled within me.

But he needed no help of mine. He made his

way leisurely past the great fire, walking with wonderful mimicry of a woman's gait, and he kept his face well in the shelter of the blanket in a way that suggested coquetry rather than disguise.

And in this manner he came straight to me. He came, unerringly as a sleep-walker, past fires, past Indians, and through the gaunt rows of maize. He looked neither to right nor left, and no one molested him. He came to where I stood silent, and put out his hand to touch mine.

"It is done," he said quietly.

His fingers were warm, and his touch tingled. I marveled. "It is a miracle," I said.

He looked at me in question. "Your hand is very cold. Monsieur, monsieur, did you fear for me so much?"

I bowed. "Yes. I did not think it could be done. You are an able man, monsieur."

He did not answer for a moment, and he followed me silently along the edge of the maize field. Then he touched my shoulder.

"Monsieur, how strange the world looks to-night. The moon, — have you ever seen it so remote and chill? Oh, we are puppets! No, it was not my wit that carried me through. It was Fate. Life has been hard on me. She is saving me now for some further trick she has to

play. I pray that it may not bring you ill, monsieur."

I knew not how to answer, for I was moved. As he said, the moon made the world strange. Great beauty is disturbing, and the night was like enchantment. He had come to me like a dream spirit in his woman's dress. I felt the need of a dash of cold water on my spirit.

"You must not put on woman's fancies with your petticoats, monsieur," I cautioned over my shoulder. "Now we had best not talk till we are safe afloat in the canoes."

The men were ebon, the canoes vague gray, and the water like sheet ice under the moon. The Englishman and I crept across the pebbles with panther feet, and the splash of a frightened otter was the only sound. I laid my finger on my lips, and my men checked their breathing. We were silent as figures in a mirror. I tapped the Englishman on the shoulder, and motioned where he should sit in the canoe.

And then, from the timber fringe behind us, came a call. "Singing Arrow! Singing Arrow! Stop! Stop!"

Sword unsheathed, I dashed across the open space of moonlight toward the trees. Who called, or why, I did not question. But I must smother the noise. "Singing Arrow!" the call

came again, and the roar of it in the quiet night made my flesh crawl.

I had not taken two strides into the timber when I saw a man running toward me. He was still calling. I leaped upon him, winding an arm about his neck, and covering his mouth. He was a small armful; a weazened body to have sheltered so great a power of lung.

"Hush! For the Virgin's sake, hush!" I stormed in noisy whispers. "Father Carheil, is it you? Hush! Hush!" I dropped my hand from his mouth. "Now speak in whispers," I implored.

The father shook his cassock free from my fingers. My embrace had been fervid, and his cassock was rumpled, and his scant hair was stringing wildly from under his skullcap. But shrunken and tumbled as he was, he was impressive. With some men, if you disarrange their outer habit, you lower their inner dignity as well. It was not so with Father Carheil.

He looked at me closely, with a sober gentleness that became him well, and that he did not often use. "Why should I go quietly?" he asked. "My errand is righteous. It is only black work that needs the cover of a silent tongue. My son, you are letting your men abduct Singing Arrow. Did your promise to me count for so little in your mind?"

I bowed, and mumbled something meaningless to gain time. I was not clear as to my course. "Why do you think that we have Singing Arrow?" I blurted out finally.

"Pemaou told me."

Pemaou again! But we had tricked him. I grinned with joy to think of him with his nose still rooted close to the deserted hole. I could almost forgive him for the trouble he was causing now.

"Pemaou lied," I said cheerfully. "Singing Arrow is not with us, Father Carheil. Will you go back now? My mission is urgent and demands secrecy."

He looked at the ground. "You swear to this? You swear that Singing Arrow is not with you?"

I laid my hand on my sword, and bared my head. "I swear."

He turned away. "You seem a gentleman," he said reluctantly. "I regret that I troubled you. I wish you fair winds, monsieur."

Beshrew me, but the man could get close to my heart. "Thank you, father," I cried earnestly. "I wish that I might requite your trust with greater candor. But, in the end, I hope to justify my means. I would that I might have your blessing on my mission and my cargo."

Blockhead that I was, not to have let well enough alone. For I was to blame for what followed. I may have grown unconsciously rhetorical, and waved my hand in the direction of the canoes. I do not know. I do know that at the word "cargo" Father Carheil turned and looked toward the shore. There, in my canoe, with gaze searching the timber where I had disappeared, stood a figure, — a woman's figure in Singing Arrow's dress and blanket.

Father Carheil looked at me. He did not speak; it was not necessary. I endured his gaze for a moment, then sold my prudence to save my honor. I laid my finger on the priest's arm.

"Come with me to the canoes," I demanded. "If you find yourself in the wrong, it may teach you to trust a man's word against your own eyesight."

He assented. We walked swiftly across the moon-lighted open, and I had scant time for fear. Yet I was afraid. I could give the Englishman no helping hand, no word of warning. Would he rise to the moment?

He did. He turned his back upon us, Indian-fashion, and squatted in his blanket. He lost all suggestion of Singing Arrow's slim elasticity, and sat in a shapeless huddle. I laughed with relief.

"Where is Singing Arrow now?" I twitted the priest. "Is this she?"

The old priest peered. "No," he meditated. "No, this is not Singing Arrow." He wheeled on me with one of his flashes of temper. "I cannot recognize this girl. Let her take off her blanket."

I motioned my men to take stations in the canoes. "Father Carheil, I beg you to let me go at once," I implored. "You see you were wrong. As to this Indian, you never saw her; she is a stranger here."

But the father was not pacified. "Let her take off her blanket," he repeated, with all the aimless persistency of age.

Did I say that the man had grown close to my heart? Why, I could have shaken him. But the Englishman cut the knot. He turned with a hunch of the shoulder, and peered at us over the corner of his blanket. Gesture, and roll of the head, he was an Indian. I was so pleased at the mimicry, that I gave way to witless laughter.

"Now!" I cried triumphantly. "Now, are you satisfied?"

But the priest did not reply. He stared, and his eyes grew ferret-sharp. Then he shifted his position, and stared again. It beat into my brain that he had lived thirty years among the

Indians, and that his eyes were trained. He could see meanings, where I saw a blank wall.

"This is no Indian woman," he said slowly, with a wagging forefinger that beat off his words like the minute hand of Fate. "This is — this is — why, this is the English prisoner!"

He brought out the last words in a crescendo, and again my hand clapped tight against his mouth.

"Be still! Be still!" I spluttered wildly, and I threw a disordered glance at the horizon, and at my astonished crew. I had not meant that the men, except Pierre, should be taken into the secret until we were well afloat. Here was another contretemps.

"Are you mad, Father Carheil!" I began, with a sorry show of dignity, while my palm stuck like a leech against his lips. "This is not " —

"Not any one but the prisoner himself," interrupted the Englishman's voice. He dropped his blanket, and sprang to the sand. "Do not lie for me, monsieur," he went on in his indolent, drawling French that already had come to have a pleasant quaintness in my ears. "Monsieur, let me speak to the father."

If Nature had given me a third hand, I should have used it to throttle the Englishman. "Get back in the canoe!" I stormed.

He motioned me away. Standing slim and tall in Singing Arrow's dress, he put me — such creatures of outward seeming are we — absurdly in the wrong, as if I had been rude to a woman.

"Father Carheil," he began, "your ears at least are not fettered. Listen, if you will. This man is not to blame. I was thrown in his way, and he took me from pity, to save my life. Now that I am discovered, I will go back to prison with you. Let this man go west. Whatever his business, it is pressing."

With two mad men on my hands, I had to choose between them. I dropped the priest, and gripped the Englishman.

"If you go back, I go with you!" I raged in his ear. Then I turned to Father Carheil. "Are you going to report this, father? It is as the Englishman says. I take him as the only way to save him from torture. May we go?"

The father thought a moment. "No," he said.

I gripped my sword. "You have seen torture, Father Carheil. Would you hand this man over to it?"

The father looked at me as if I were print for his reading. "I am piecing facts together," he said, with unmoved slowness. "Singing Arrow is in league with you, for the prisoner is wearing

her clothes. The Indians are wild with brandy, which, it is rumored, Singing Arrow furnished. The brandy must have come from you. Is that so? Answer me. Answer, in the name of the Holy Church. Is that so?"

I bowed. "You are a logician," I said bitterly. "Father, I can hear the tom-toms. It is a miracle that we have escaped undetected so long. Our respite cannot last many minutes longer. May we go?"

My tone seemed to reach him, and he wavered a moment. "Perhaps," he began haltingly; then he backed several paces. "No!" he cried, all his small wiry figure suddenly tense. "No! You are a dangerous man. You carry brandy, and no one knows your errand. If I let you go, I may save one man from torture, — which, after all, is but an open door to the blessed after life, — but I shall be letting you carry brandy and perdition on to scores of souls. No." And he opened his mouth to call for help.

But I was on him before his shout could frame itself to sound. I drew my handkerchief, and tied it, bandage-firm, across his mouth. Then I called to Pierre, and bidding him bring me thongs from our store in the canoe, I proceeded to bind the priest firmly. He was slight as a woman in my hands. I could feel the sharp-

ness and brittleness of his old bones through his wrinkled skin, and I was sick at myself. "I am sorry. I am sorry. I am sorry," I heard myself repeating, explaining to him, and to myself, and, mostly, to the God who judges us. I looked at the wonderful mobile old face, with all its weakness, and all its wonderful white goodness, and hated myself for laying hands of violence on such a man. "I am sorry," I cried again. I looked at the spit of land that separated us from the camp, and the light from the fires glowed red above it. The din of dogs and men swelled high. Something was happening. I glanced down at the priest, but turned away quickly, for I had no stomach for what I had done.

"They will find you soon," I said, with my throat tightening. "God knows I 'm sorry."

Then I dashed to the canoes. "Quickly!" I cried, and I shoved the Englishman down behind me, that I might not have to see even the glint of his red blanket to anger me by thought of what I had sacrificed.

In a moment, our paddles were dipping. I looked back at the settlement. "It is done!" I cried under my breath, and I could not forbid a moment of exultation. I glanced at the Englishman.

But I met no exultation there. The man's

strange eyes were still grave. "No, monsieur, it is just begun," he corrected, and I thought, as I saw his look at the retreating shore, that he shrunk from the uncertainties ahead more than from the death behind. Was there a coward streak in him, after all? I turned my back, and did not speak again.

CHAPTER VIII

PARTNERS

To paddle by day, to work in sun and breeze, is a pastime, but to paddle by night drains a man's endurance. For long hours our canoes nosed their way around headland after headland and along wild shores peopled by beasts and shadows. The black water was a threat and a mystery, and the moonlight was chill, so that our limbs, which should have bounded with red blood, were aching and leaden with the cold. I stretched myself with relief when the red-streaked horizon told me it was time to land and make camp.

I was prepared for pursuit, but knew that, with Pierre in one canoe and Labarthe in the other, we must be well in advance of it. Now I purposed to stop and hide. It is more to my taste to be hound than hare, and I do not like an enemy snapping at my heels. So I prepared to land. Once the pursuing canoes had passed us we could take up the chase on our own part and follow at leisure.

I called the word to the other canoe, and then as we swung shoreward I turned to look at the Englishman. All night I had heard no sound

from him, nor glanced his way. My thoughts of him had been bitter, for he was a sore weight on my hands. Yet this I knew was unjust, and I was shamed for my own bad temper. My surliness must have pricked him, as he sat silent through the long hours of dark and cold; and now that the approaching sun was putting me in a better humor, I could see that I had been hard, and I determined to speak to him fairly.

And so I turned, puckering my lips to a smile that did not come easily, for my face was stiff and my spirit sore. But I might have spared my pains. The prisoner was asleep. He lay in a chrysalis of red blanket, his head tipped back on a bundle of sailcloth, his face to the stars. He was submerged in the deep slumber where the soul deserts the body and travels unknown ways. Judged by his look of lax muscles and surrender, he had lain that way for hours, — the hours when I had been punishing him with my averted glance.

I woke him with a hand on his shoulder.

"You slept well," I accused.

He shivered under my hand and opened his eyes. It took him an instant to recognize me, but when he did he smiled with relief. I could not but see that there was something pleasant in his smile. I saw, too, that sleep had wiped the lines from his face, and given him a touch of color.

"Did I sleep? Did I really sleep?" he marveled. "Monsieur, you are very good to me."

But I was in no holiday humor, so only shrugged, and told him to unload the bales. He smiled again, nodding, and jumped to the shore with buoyancy that was an affront to our numbed muscles. But once at work he was as useless as a sailor in a hayfield. He could lift nothing, and he was hopelessly under foot. I bade him stand aside, and I prayed for patience. After all he was young, and had been through great hardship. I would spare him what I could for a time.

It is depressing to work in a cold dawn on an empty stomach. Our landing had been made at the mouth of a rivulet, and we followed it till we found a place, some quarter mile inland, that was open enough for a camp. Here bale by bale we brought the cargo, piling it under trees and covering it with sailcloth. The canoes we put bottom up in the open, that the sun might dry them. I left Pierre hidden at the shore to watch the horizon for our pursuers, and the rest of us proceeded to breakfast.

It was cheerless. When I say we made a camp it is misleading, for we could not swing our kettles for fear of the betraying smoke. We sat down stiffly, for the ground was still wet from the night dew, and we passed our bags of

dried maize and jerked meat from hand to hand. I made some ado to eat cheerfully, for I saw that the men were surly from this unnecessary hardship. The western Indians were friendly, and if we had not had this incubus of an Englishman on our hands we should have had fire and song, a boiling pot, and roasting maize cakes. There was no muttering among the men, for I was there, but they looked glowering, and drew away.

The Englishman ate in silence. I was too ruffled and crossgrained to talk to him, but I could not keep myself from watching him. His eyes were less sad than I had thought. I could imagine that they might easily be merry. But they were watchful eyes. He saw the discontent among the men, and finally he rose and went to them. I followed him with some warning in my look, for I thought that he was vexed, and I knew that his tongue was sharp, but I realized in a moment that his brain was in control and that he was safe.

"I have brought you all discomfort," he said, with a shake of the head, and his slow French gave his words more meaning than they perhaps deserved. "I regret this. It is hard for me to bear, for it is new to me to be a burden. But what can I do? I cannot go away. I am not enamored of this voyage, for I do not like being thrust upon your company, but you saved my

life, and I have no right to throw away what you went to such lengths to preserve. What would you have me do?"

The oafs exchanged glances. They spoke after a minute in a united, disjointed grumble.

"You don't work."

The Englishman looked at them and at me. I realized that he was curiously slight and young, and that we seemed hostile. That was hardly just, and I was ready to go to his rescue. But he turned from me to the men.

"It is true that I work very badly," he said. "I do not know how. But men are born of women, and — well, what a man can do I can learn. Suppose, now, that I go and relieve Pierre at the watch. If you will show me what to do I think you will find me teachable. I shall try to be as little of a burden as possible. Here is my hand on it." And he held out his slim palm for their grasp.

Again they stared; but the hand won them. They touched it fumblingly and were impressed. They were a slow lot, selected for various purposes other than wit. Their minds moved too sluggishly for swift reactions, and I dismissed anxiety about them from my mind.

The Englishman turned to me. "Will you conduct me to the shore? I will take Pierre's place."

It was my turn to stare. "Suppose you conduct yourself," was on my tongue, but I let it escape unsaid. "Come, then," I answered, with a shrug.

I led the way over logs and under bushes, and the Englishman followed silently; silently at least as to his tongue, but his feet were garrulous. They stepped on twigs, stumbled on slippery lichen, and shouted their passage for rods around.

"I would rather lead a buffalo in tether," I fretted, and just as I said it he completed the sum of his blundering by catching his toe in a root and plunging head foremost to the ground. I pulled him up by the sleeve of his skin blouse and shook him free from loam and twigs.

"Now will you stop that?" I cried.

He looked at me gravely, unabashed, but curious. "I did not fall purposely to irritate you. Gravity, which, I understand, operates alike on the learned and the foolish, had some share in it. Why are you angry?"

"Why are you reckless? You have crashed through here as careless of noise as a stag with the hounds hot behind."

He dropped to the ground, and took one slim moccasined foot in his hand. He looked at it soberly. "It seems a small thing, does it not, to cause so much ill-will between us? It has

neither weight nor mental force above it, that it should make the earth tremble. No, monsieur, you are searching for excuses for your annoyance with me. You are annoyed all the time. I vex you by my silence, still more by my speech. We are to be some time together, and I do not want to be a constant canker. Is it not possible for you to forget me, to ignore me?"

I saw he was in earnest. "And so you really do not know what irritated me? Are you so little of a woodsman?"

"I have never traveled through the woods."

I gave him a dubious glance. "Yet you were weeks with the Hurons after your capture."

I saw him set his teeth hard as if at a memory. "We traveled by water ways. I was little on the shore except at night."

A sudden picture sickened me. The nightly camp and this slender lad with his curious air of daintiness, and the great oily Hurons lounging in the dirt and smoke.

"Were they cruel to you?" I broke out.

He shook his head. "No," he said, with the air of justice I had liked in him heretofore; "no, they were not cruel. Indeed they were almost kind, in that they left me a great deal alone. I feared from the clemency they showed me that they were reserving me for torture."

I eyed him with some skepticism. "It was

not the Hurons, but their rivals, the Ottawas, who would have sent you to the stake," I explained curtly. "The Hurons — those of the Baron's band — would have held you as a hostage, — perhaps as a deputy."

He looked up with interested eyes. "You are playing some political game, and these tribes are your counters. I should like to understand."

I examined his look, but could make nothing of it. "You will pardon me, monsieur," I said with a shrug, "but these are troublous times, and I find it hard to believe you as ignorant as you seem."

He still met my look. "And if I were not ignorant?" he asked. "Could I, one Englishman, alone and unarmed, accomplish anything that would hurt you? You see that I am harmless. Why not be friends?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"So you are determined that I am a secret ambassador," he meditated. "Well, I must act my part with dignity. And you think we cannot be comrades? I dislike to irritate you as I do."

I answered him soberly. "We will be partners," I agreed; "friends for the night's bivouac, willing to help and to share."

"But you will not trust me?"

I looked away. "What would a truce be-

tween us mean? You are English, I, French. Be assured that sooner or later the fox eats the hen."

He laughed. "Who is to be the fox?" He jumped to his feet. "Partners, then, it shall be. A strange creed. A helping hand to-day and a knife in the back to-morrow. But I shall follow you, monsieur."

"You will follow?"

"In this path as in others. If you refuse to admit even a truce between us, I agree. I shall keep out of your way as much as possible. Only — I would not have you think me ungrateful."

I could never forbear a smile when he was serious. "We shall probably think very little about each other," I said comfortably. "Once settled into routine we shall have work to fill our thought. You will learn to do your share. I think you willing."

"Indeed I am willing, monsieur."

"Good. So we shall work hard, sleep early, and the months will pass before we know. Let us not talk of trust or friendship, since our ways are divided."

He bowed. "You are right, monsieur. And I meant only this, — I will try not to be an irritation. You will try not to think of me as such. You agree?"

I smiled again. "Yes. Partners for the night," I reminded him. "I am gratified, Monsieur Starling, that you see the matter so reasonably. There is a gulf between us, and we cannot change it." We did not speak again till we reached Pierre at the shore.

CHAPTER IX

WESTWARD

WHERE were the pursuing Indians? For two days we watched, and the water was unflecked by sign of life. We listened in the murk of night and strained our eyes in the sun's dazzle. But we found nothing but forest and sky and mystery. We were alone with our shadows.

The forty-eight hours crawled. Except at noonday we were chilled, our stomachs complained of the cold food, and our minds, and therefore our bodies, were sluggish. The Englishman had the best of it, for he could sleep like a bear in winter. Save for the hours when he was on watch he knew but little of what was passing. He lay on the warm side of the bank and slept with his face to the sun.

At the end of two days I felt that I had paid all reasonable due to Prudence, and could follow Inclination and be comfortable.

"We shall push on at daybreak to-morrow," I told the men. "Hang the kettles. To-night we shall have a boiling pot."

Truly a fire makes home of a wilderness. We sat with our heels to the blaze, and grew jovial.

The Englishman said little, but was alert to serve us.

"It is salt to the broth to have it given me by a pretty squaw," I told him as he filled my bowl a second time.

He flushed with anger, and I thought myself that it was a cheap jest and unworthy. He had been considerate to wear his disguise without complaint.

"I shall find something for you to wear when we shift our cargo to leave," I promised him, and since my mood was still mellow, I looked him over with a smile. He had smoothed and rounded in a wonderful manner in his two days of rest, and I was pleased by the red in his cheeks. "You will soon be a second Pierre if you sleep and eat in this fashion," I laughed at him, "and then there will be no room for you in the canoe. If all your countrymen sleep as you do, it is small wonder that they have left us undisturbed in the beaver lands."

He smiled a little in deference to my small jest, but the next instant he looked away. "I had not slept in weeks," he said softly, as if ashamed of his excuse.

That shamed me, and I came to my feet and let my bowl of broth spill where it would.

"Sleep well, lad. You are safe with us," I cried, and I left my meal unfinished, and went to the hidden cargo. Then and there I would

find proper clothing for the Englishman. I had been slothful in the matter.

The clothing was stored deep, and I was bending to the search with some shortness of breath, when the Englishman touched my shoulder.

"Is it clothing for me?"

I handed him a blanket coat for answer. "It is large, but warm," I said, and bent again to my task.

Still he kept a hand on my shoulder. "Monsieur, I am satisfied with my dress."

I could be putty in his hands one moment and scorn him the next. "Nonsense!" I snapped over my shoulder.

But he clung like a gnat. "It is not nonsense. Stop a moment and listen to my reasons."

I drew myself up reluctantly. "Well?"

He stood with arms akimbo, his head to one side. "It is as plain as a pikestaff. In this dress I can go where you cannot. I can reconnoitre for you. In your man's coat I should be grotesque, for it is twice my size. I should be noticeable and draw comment on us. As it is, I can go unobserved."

Now this was partly true. "But the presence of a woman would discredit our canoes," I objected.

He turned this over. "A woman would discredit your party?"

"Of course."

"But no one sees you but the Indians."

"They report to the priests."

"And you care what the priests think?"

"I care for the good name of my company. Monsieur, do you like to wear a squaw's dress?"

He laughed. "Why not? I like women. Why scorn their garb? But I see your reasons, monsieur. They are better than mine. So get out the clothing, — though I shall look like an eel in a bear's skin."

But I had lost my haste. Mock woman that he was, he was yet somewhat pleasant to the eye. I had noticed more than once the picture that he made as he came and went among the trees. Yet I thought lightly of myself for enjoying the deceit of my eyesight. I rose.

"Wear your skirts, then, for a few days longer," I said coldly. "It is too dark to find what I want. Come now. We must sleep early, and be up betimes, for we shall take up our journey in the morning."

We were astir at daybreak. It was a red morning, and the birds were singing. The air was keen, but the fire snapped cheerfully, and the sky gave promise of a warm day. We carried the bales to the beach, and were ready for the canoes. Then I missed the Englishman.

He had been aloof and moody during breakfast, and I searched for him with some alarm.

I found him in the hollow where he slept at night; he would not sleep near the rest of us, saying that we disturbed him with our snoring. He was on his back, his gaze on the tree-tops, and he was frowning heavily.

I broke through the bushes. "You are ill!"

He jumped to his feet. "No, no, monsieur! Ill only in mind. Monsieur, I have failed you."

I had never seen his aplomb so shaken. "Why were you lying on the ground?"

"To find out whether I could see again what I saw last night. Do you see that balsam, — the one with the forked top? Monsieur, I saw an Indian's face in that tree last night."

I took his hands, which were cold. "Now tell me."

He drew his hands away. "I am often awake in the night. Last night the moon was clear. All at once I saw an Indian's face looking out from that tree."

"And you did not call me!"

"Monsieur, I thought it must be fancy. I have troubled dreams. I often — since my capture — think I see an Indian, and it proves to be nothing but a bush. So I distrust my eyes, especially at night. Then François was on watch, and several times he walked this way.

If it had really been an Indian would not François have seen?"

I pointed him to the forest. "Do you see anything? We seem alone, yet there are countless eyes watching us, from the squirrel over your head to the Indian who may be listening now. When you lay on your back just now did you see anything that looked like a face?"

He shook his head. "No, the space was open. But, monsieur, I have been over the ground. I can find no track."

I went to the balsam and examined it. Then I called the Englishman and pointed to a patch of rubbed lichen on the bark above our heads. "His foot slipped. What was he like? How was his hair dressed?"

He gasped a little. "Monsieur, it could not have been a real Indian. The rubbed moss, — why, an animal could have done that. As to his appearance, it was strange. His head was shaved on one side, and he had long braided hair on the other. Surely it was a dream."

I laughed. "Come, Starling, the canoes are waiting."

"Monsieur, did you ever see an Indian shaved in that way?"

I nodded. "Many times."

"Monsieur, monsieur! What kind of Indians?"

"It is a Huron mode."

"Then we have been followed?"

I shrugged. "Evidently. I do not understand their game, but they will declare it soon enough. Come, Starling."

But he lingered. "Monsieur, I blundered. I should have waked you."

I stopped to lay a hand on his shoulder. "And you will blunder again if you waste strength in regrets. Come, a hangdog look means a divided mind, and I need your wits. Keep what watch you can, and we shall say nothing of this."

The men had carried the canoes to the beach, and now sat beside them, drumming their heels in idleness. This gave me excuse for rating them, and I did it with force of lung. Thinking that there were Indians — or, at least, an Indian — in hiding, I hoped to draw them from cover in this fashion. But my brave periods rattled uselessly. The forest kept its springtime peace, and all that I got out of my display of spirit was the excitement of playing my part well to an unseen audience. We were allowed to load our canoes in peace.

And more, we were allowed to depart. I was prepared for a flight of arrows as a parting courtesy, but none came. Well, I could make nothing of the situation. I stored the inci-

dent away as something to remember, but not to distress myself about. The men sang as they dipped their blades. I sang, too, when I could get the tune. It was a fine morning, and my blood was astir. I saw the Englishman's color rise under the whip of the quick motion and the keen air. He did not speak unless I addressed him, but his look was almost happy. I could not help liking it in him that he should enjoy the freedom of our journeying, and should feel the majesty of the untraveled waters. I saw that he was trying, as he promised, not to intrude upon my notice, and I wondered a little what he would be saying to me now if I had answered him otherwise, and had said that we could be friends. Perhaps I had cut myself off from pleasant intercourse. He certainly had gayety of spirit, even if he somewhat lacked in strength of head.

We paddled only till mid-afternoon. I was as eager to meet the western Indians as I had been anxious to avoid those we left behind, and now my object was to invite attention. It was the season for beaver and otter trapping, and I hoped to encounter hunting parties, so we landed, made camp in the open, and piled our fire till the smoke blurred the sky.

The spirit of the afternoon was toward idleness. We fished some, but loitered more, and I had no word of reproof for the men for using

hours of good daylight playing the dish game they had learned among the Ottawas. I heard them stake their patrimony in this world, and their hopes of the next, on the throw of the black and yellow balls, but I smoked my pipe, and let them brag and squabble. The bees were droning, the sun lay warm on my back, and the forest was at peace. Two years before, I remembered, I had worn lace and periwig on this day, and had stood in his majesty's ante-chamber. Now I was gaunt and rusty as a bear in spring. I looked at the secret forest, the uncharted water, and at my smoke-grimed men squatting like monkeys over a savage game, and I smote my knee with content. Truly it was a satisfying thing to live while the world afforded such contrasts! And if I played my present cards with skill, there might be a still greater contrast in store for me when next I stood in that ante-chamber and heard my name carried within. But that thought made me restless, and I went in search of the Englishman.

The Englishman had sat apart from us since we landed, and now I found him with his back against a rock ledge looking at the water. I was in a mood when I had to wag my tongue to some one and ease myself of some spreading fancies. So I dropped down beside him.

"Monsieur," I began by way of introduction to my theme, "are you indeed a yoeman?"

He looked up with an excess of solemnity. "No, monsieur."

This was not the answer I had expected, — though, in truth, I had given the matter little thought. "Then you are a gentleman?" I asked, deflected from my intended speech.

He shook his head. "No, monsieur, no gentleman."

I did not like his hidden play with words, although I understood it. "That is a farce!" I said unkindly. "It is folly to say that in your Colonies you will have no caste. You cannot change nature. Can you make a camel of a marmoset? I asked you what you were born?"

He smiled. "I was born an English subject. Monsieur, I have answered three questions. You owe me three in turn. Did you ever know Robert Cavelier?"

I stared. "The Seigneur de la Salle?"

"The same."

I stared again. "He has been dead for eight years. What do you, an Englishman, know of him?"

He gave a wave of the hand. "It was my question," he reminded. "I asked if you knew him."

I could not but be amused. How he liked

to play at mystery! I would copy his brevity. "Yes," I replied.

He looked up with much interest. "So you knew him. Tell me, monsieur, was he mountebank and freebooter, or a gallant gentleman much maligned?"

I removed my hat. "He was neither. He was an ambition incarnate; an ambition so vast there were few to understand it, for it had no personal side. You said the other night that but few motives rule men. La Salle has been misunderstood because the usual motives—greed, the love of woman, and the desire for fame—did not touch him. He was the slave of one great idea, and so he was lonely and men feared him." I finished with some defiance. I knew that the blood had risen in my cheeks as I spoke, for some subjects touch me as if I were a woman. The Englishman was watching me, and I disliked to have him see what I felt was weakness. But he did not scoff. His own cheeks flushed somewhat, and he looked off at the water.

"La Salle had more than a great idea," he said meditatively. "He had great opportunity. He desired to found an empire in the west, did he not, monsieur? Well, he failed, but, perhaps, that was accident. He might have succeeded. It is not often in the history of the world that such an opportunity comes to any

person, man or woman. La Salle, at least, tried to live up to his full stature. Monsieur, how pitiable it would be, yes, more, how terrible it would be, to have such an opportunity thrown in your way and know that you were too weak to seize it."

His voice rose to some earnestness, but I was ashamed of my own emotion, and so threw pebbles at the water and kept my mood cold. I suspected that through all this random philosophizing I was being probed, — probed by an Englishman who ate my rations, and wore a squaw's dress. I grew angry.

"Who are you?" I demanded roughly. "Who are you, that you know of La Salle and of his plans, and use the French speech. Can you, for once, answer me fairly, or is there no sound core of honesty in you?"

He rose. But he replied, not to what I had said, but to what I had thought. "It is true that I share your food and your escort, and that I requite you but poorly. Yet I must remind you again, I share it under compulsion. I cannot be entirely open with you, — are you open with me? — but I will tell you all that it is necessary for you to know, all that touches you in any way. I said that I was a colonist. It was the truth, but I had been but a year in the Colonies at the time of my capture. I was

born in England, and I have passed some time in France. As to La Salle, I know nothing of him save what any man might hear. Is it strange that I should be interested in him now that I find myself following in his steps? Why do you always see a double meaning in my words, monsieur?"

I filled my pipe, and answered truthfully, "I do not know."

But here he began to laugh. "Monsieur, forgive me, but truly I forget at times that I am a spy, that you distrust me. You are kind and I am interested, and so I grow careless of the fact that I am in a land where no speech is idle, where every glance is weighed. This life must unfit one for court talk, monsieur."

What was he after? I eyed him over my pipe bowl, but said nothing. I was minded to tell him to clean the whitefish for our supper, but reflected in time that he would undoubtedly do it badly, so I spoke to François instead. But when I would have gone away the Englishman followed. He clapped me lightly on the shoulder, a familiarity he had not ventured before, and he put his head on one side with a little bantam swagger.

"If I am an enemy, I am an enemy," he bowed. "Yet one question, please, and I swear in the name of our joint father Noah that I ask

it with the fairest motives in mind. Tell me something of what we are going to do. Is to-day a sample?"

I could not hold my ill-temper. He must have led a psalm-singing youth that every attempt at rakishness should make him as piquant as a figure at a masque.

"Yes," I replied. "To-day is a sample except that we have been indolent this afternoon. I made this a semi-holiday as a sop to the men for the added burden I have laid on them. I wish to do some exploring along the coast here, and we shall have to spend some time hunting. If you show yourself capable I shall leave you in charge of the camp while we are away."

This time he bowed gravely. "Thank you, monsieur. I have not been blind to the way you have spared me hardship, but when I said that I would do whatever you would teach me, I meant it. I think that I shall make a good woodsman in time."

But I laughed. "You wash yourself too much ever to make a good woodsman," I told him, and I set him to measuring the meal for our supper, for indeed his hands were well kept, and it was pleasant to see him handle the food.

CHAPTER X

I WAKE A SLEEPER

WHAT enchantment came upon the weather for the next week I do not know. May is often somewhat sour of visage, but now she smiled from dawn till starlight. We paddled and hunted and slept, well fed and fire-warmed. It was more like junketing than business, and we were as amiable as fat-bellied puppies. Even the Englishman looked content. We left him in camp when we went to hunt, and on our return he had a boiling pot and hot coals ready for our venison. I saw that he had won favor with the men. Yet he kept aloof from all of us, as he had promised.

This had gone on for a week, when one day, after we had placed the Englishman on guard and were tramping back into the timber to see what our eyes and muskets could find, Pierre pointed to a bent tree. "It looks like a cow's back," he ruminated. "Trees are queer. Today, where we made camp, I saw a tree that looked like a Huron with his topknot."

I stopped. "Where?"

"I told the master. Near the camp."

"You think it was a tree?"

Pierre shuffled. "There are no Hurons here. This is the Pottawatamie country. But I have thought about it all day. It was a queer tree. Shall I go back and see?"

I shook my head. I pointed to a stale bear print, and set the men upon it. Then I turned and slipped back to camp.

I walked with uneasiness in my throat. Why did a Huron dog us in this fashion? Was he alone? Did he mean mischief to the Englishman? Was the Englishman in league with him? Too many questions for a slow man. I felt entrapped and befogged. I must see for myself. And so I crept to the camp to spy upon it.

I have never seen sweeter spot for an anchorage than we had found that day. We had not camped on the open coast as had been our custom, but in a sun-warmed meadow a few paces inland, where there were birds, and tasseling grasses, and all kinds of glancing lights and odors to steal into a man's blood. I parted the trees. The blur of gray ashes from our fire was undisturbed; our canoes lay, bottom upwards, waiting to have the seams newly pitched, and the cargo was piled, untouched, against a tree. All was as we left it. And there, in the shade of a maple, lay the Englishman, asleep on his scarlet blanket.

I went softly, and looked down at him. I ought to have waked him, and rated him for sleeping at his post, but I could not. It was balm to find him here safe. He was twisted like a kitten with his head in his arm, and I noticed that his dark hair, which he kept roughly cut, was curly. He must have been wandering in the woods, for he had a bunch of pink blossoms, very waxy and odorous, shut tight in his hand. I looked at him till I suddenly wanted him to wake and look at me. I picked a grass stalk, and, leaning over, brushed it against his lips.

He woke as a child does, not alert at once, but with drowsy stirrings, and finally with open eyes so sleep-filled that they were as expressionless as a fawn's. He stared as if trying to remember who I was.

I sat beside him. "I am the owner of that cargo you are guarding," I supplied to aid his memory, and then laughed to see the red flood his face when he came to himself and realized what he had done. But I was not at ease. He had shivered and drawn back when he first opened his eyes. Could he be afraid of me? I should not wish that. I tried to be crafty.

"Who did you think I was when you first woke?" I asked, taking my pipe and preparing to be comfortable.

He pushed back his hair. "Benjamin," he answered vaguely. He was still half asleep.

"But you told me your name was Benjamin!" I put down my flint and tinder.

He met my look. "I have a cousin Benjamin, as well," he rejoined. "I was dreaming of him. Monsieur, I am humiliated to think that I went to sleep. I have never done so before."

My pipe drew well, and I did not feel like chiding. "It does not matter," I said, with a yawn. "You must not take it amiss, monsieur, if I confess that, as a guard, I have never considered you much more seriously than I would that brown thrush above you. What is your posy?" and I leaned over and took the flowers from his hand.

He smiled at me drowsily. "The arbutus," he explained, with a lingering touch of his finger upon the blossoms. "Smell them, monsieur. I found them in Connecticut last spring. Are they not well suited to be the first flowers of this wild land? Repellent without, — see how rough the leaves are to your finger, — but fragrant and beautiful under its harsh coating. Life in the Colonies grew to seem to me much the same."

I turned the flowers over, and considered his philosophy. "You are less cynical than your wont, monsieur," I reflected. "May I say that

I like it better in you? Cynicism is a court exotic. It should not grow under these pines."

He put out his hand to brush a twig from my doublet. "Cynicism is often the flower of bitterness. Monsieur, you have been very good to me. I cannot keep in mind my constant bitterness against life when I think of the thoughtfulness and justice you have shown me."

I jerked away. "Sufficient! Sufficient! Let us be comfortable," I expostulated, and I turned my back, and gave myself to my pipe and silence.

The birds sang softly as if wearied, and the earth was warm to the hand. I held the flowers in my fingers, and they smelled, somehow, like the roses on our terrace at home on moonlight evenings when I had been young and thought myself in love. I watched a drift of white butterflies hang over an opening red blossom. Such moments pay for hours of famine. It disturbed me to have the Englishman rise and go away.

"Why do you go?" I demanded.

He came back at once. "What can I do for you, monsieur?"

His gentleness shamed my shortness of speech. "It was nothing," I replied. "The truth is, it was pleasant to have you here beside me." I laughed at my own folly. "Starling, I will put you in man's dress to-morrow!" I cried.

He turned away. "As you like, monsieur. I think myself it would be best. Will you get out the clothes to-night?"

But I stared at him. "Why blush about it, Starling?" I shrugged. I felt some disdain of his sensitiveness. "I did not mean to twit you. I understand that you have worn the squaw's dress to help us. But I think that the necessity for disguise is past. I see the skirts embarrass you."

He turned to look at me fairly. "I am not blushing, monsieur," he explained, with a great air of candor. "It is the heat of the afternoon;" but even as he spoke the red flowed from chin to forehead, and when I looked at him with another laugh, his eyes fell before mine.

I rose on my elbow. "Starling! Starling!" I cried. He made no sound. His head drooped, and I saw him clench his hand. I stared. He threw his head back, but when he tried to meet my look he failed. Yet I looked again. "My God!" I heard my voice say, and my teeth bit into my lip. I could smell the flowers in my hand, but they seemed a long distance away. "My God!" I cried again, and I rose and felt my way into the woods with the step of a blind man.

CHAPTER XI

MARY STARLING

I DO not know how long I walked, nor where, but the sun dropped some space. When I returned to the camp, I found the men before me. They had returned early, empty-handed, and were in an ill humor because the Englishman was away, and there was nothing done. I commanded Pierre to build a larger fire than usual, and keep it piled high till I returned. Then I began a search for footprints.

They were easily found. The young grass crushed at a touch, and it was child's work to pick out the moccasin track across the meadow. When the steps reached the beach they were harder to follow. I lost them for a while, though there were scattered pebbles that would have led me straight as a homing pigeon, had I been cool enough in mind to have my eyes and wits as sharp as usual. As it was, I doubled, and squandered time, until the sun began to loom red near the horizon. And all the time I was saying to myself, "It is not true. It is not true."

The windings of the track puzzled me. It

would go straight into the forest for a space, then double sharply, and come back to the beach. It came to me at last that the wish to hide pulled the steps into the timber, and that the fear and solitude of the great woods speedily drove them out again. Then I determined to pay no attention to these detours, but push along the beach. And doing this, I speedily came upon the red blanket flung down in the shelter of a rock, and its owner resting upon it.

When I saw that all was well, I became suddenly exhausted, and went forward slowly. I reached the red blanket, and looked down. Yes, all was well. A hunting knife lay in an open bundle. I stooped and seized it, and hurled it far into the water, and then I asked, rather huskily, a question that had not been in my mind at all: —

"What is your name?"

"Mary Starling." The woman had risen, and stood with her hands pressed tight against her throat; the look she gave me was the saddest I had ever seen. "Monsieur, you wrong me. The knife that you threw away was for my protection, — for my food."

I stood over her. "You swear this?" I said, breathing hard.

She held her head high. "Monsieur, I am a coward in many ways, but not in this. Life is

bitter, but I will live it as long as the Powers please. I will take what comes. Even among the Indians I was not tempted to — to that."

"You would have died. Starved here in the wilderness, if I had not found you."

"Perhaps, monsieur. Yet I gave myself what chance I could. I took some food, a fishing line, and that knife."

"Why did you leave me?"

"Monsieur!"

"I say, why did you leave me?"

"Monsieur, what else could I do? I would have discredited you. Those were your words. 'A woman would discredit our canoes.'"

"Yet you were — you were a woman all the time."

"Not in your eyes, monsieur."

I gripped her hand. "Did the Indians suspect?"

"Never for a moment."

"Yet when they captured you" —

"I was in man's dress. I — I was trying to defend the blockhouse. The men had — had — had" —

I seized her in my arm, and made her drink from my brandy flask. In a moment the color came back to her lips, and she drew away.

"I have never done this before," she explained unsteadily. "Never since my capture. I sup-

pose it is because — because you know. And so I cannot play the man. Monsieur, believe me. I would never have come with you, never, if I had not felt sure of myself. Sure that I could play my part, and that you would not know. I — I — tried, a little, to make you understand there at the commandant's, and when I saw that you were really blind I thought that I was safe. Believe me, monsieur."

I handed her my flask. "Drink more," I commanded. I took the blanket and wrapped it around her though the air was still warm. "You must not let yourself have chills in this fashion if you would save your strength. Madame, I believe nothing about you that is not brave and admirable. Are you Madame Starling, and is Benjamin your husband that you took his name to shield you, and even repeated the name in your dreams?"

She looked at me, and I felt rebuked for something that had been in my tone. "I am unmarried," she said steadily. "Benjamin Starling is a cousin. Monsieur, there is nothing left either of us but to let me go. Oh, if I could live this day over and be more careful! How was it, how was it that I let you know?"

I walked away. A frightened mink ran across my feet, and I cursed at it. Then I walked back.

"You did not let me know," I said, and I stooped to pick up her bundle. "I know nothing. I was always the blindest of men. Come, Monsieur Starling, let us go back to camp."

Again she put her hands to her throat. "You mean that?"

I took the bundle in my arm. "It is the only way. Come, monsieur."

"I cannot."

"I think that you must."

"And can we go on as before?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "We can try. Come, Monsieur Starling, the men are growling, for you should have made the fire. Remember, you strayed into the woods and lost your way. Come, come, you must do your part."

She looked at me, and a sudden dry sob shook her. "Forgive me, monsieur!" she cried. "Yes, I will come." She tried to square her shoulders. "I must get my spirit back before I can meet the men in camp. Why am I such a coward!"

I dropped the bundle that I might take both her hands. "Mademoiselle," I said, "look at me. We are puppets in this matter. You have been thrown into my hands against my will and your own, and I swear to you that I will deal with you as fairly as I have strength. But you must play your part. So long as I treat you as

a woman you will be a coward. Therefore I must be harsh with you. You have great will and can endure loneliness of soul. I must thrust you back upon yourself. There must be no woman in the camp. Come, monsieur, let us not talk of this longer. Are you ready?" And not waiting for assent, I led the way back to camp without word or look; I even kept myself from putting out a helping hand when I heard the steps behind me falter and almost fall.

As we came to the fire and met the men, I found myself fingering my sword. But it was a useless motion. The oafs saw nothing amiss, though to me the very air was shouting the secret. We had a fat larder, broiled whitefish and bear-steak from the kill of the day before, and the men were thinking much of their stomachs and not at all of the Englishman, save when they turned their backs upon him to show that he was out of favor. So we sat down to meat. We sat a long time, while the twilight faded and the stars pricked out clear, and there was little talk between us. I was sitting at meat with a woman, a woman of my own class, and I dared not offer her even the courtesy that one may show a serving maid. Well, I would take what each day might bring and not look ahead. I would think nothing about this person, as man or woman, but would fill my thought with

the purpose that had brought me to the beaver lands. I told the men to be early astir that we might make a longer day of travel on the morrow.

The morrow was gray. The wind was in the east, and the sunrise watery and streaked with slate-colored bands. The water was clammy and opaque, repellent to touch and sight. The way looked dreary, and the woman carried her head high, as if in challenge to her courage. She had risen early, and had gone through her trifling share in the preparations, and though she had avoided me, I could see that she was ready to play her part.

We paddled on our knees that morning, for the waves were choppy. By ten o'clock the bands of cloud had merged into a dun canopy, and by noon a slow, cold rain was drizzling. I dreaded a halt, but the necessity pressed. I selected a small cove, well tree-grown, and we turned our canoes inland.

Fortunately the rain, though persistent, had been gentle, and had not penetrated far under the heavy foliaged pines. We selected a clump of large trees, chopped the lower branches, and scraping away the surface layer of moss and needles found dry ground. Here we piled the cargo in two mounds, which we hooded with tarpaulins and with our overturned canoes.

Our provisions were snug enough; it was ourselves who were in dreary estate.

It rained all the afternoon, stopped for a half hour at sunset, when the sky, for a few moments, showed streaks of red, then closed in for a night's drizzle. I had built what shelter I could for the woman out of boughs covered with sheets of paper birch and elm. I had made a similar shelter for myself that I might not seem to discriminate too much in favor of the Englishman, and had told the men to do the same. But they were indolent, and stopped at chopping a few hemlock boughs, which they laid across crotched aspens. In truth, our shelters accomplished little against the cold and wet. Do what we could, we had great discomfort, and morning found the rain still dripping and the sky still unbroken gray.

And so it went for three days. The north country has such storms in the spring, and they chill all beauty out of the woods. We could do nothing. We kept what fire we could, regummed the seams of the canoes, and for the rest ate, sulked, and tried to sleep. The men gambled among themselves, and I grew weary of the click, click of their balls and the sound of their stupid boasts and low jesting. Yet I had no ground for stopping them, for the woman understood almost nothing of their uncouth speech. Indeed, she was little in sight or hear-

ing. She stayed in her bark shelter, and I could hear her moving about, trying to keep it neat and herself in order. In those three days I learned one secret of her spirit. She had a natural merriment that did not seem a matter of will power nor even of wish. It was an instinctive, inborn content, that was perhaps partly physical, in that it enabled her to sleep well, and so to wake with zest and courage. By night her eyes might be dark circled and her step slow, but each morning there was interest in her looks to see what the strange day was about to bring. I had seen this nature in men many times; I had not thought that it belonged to women who are framed to follow rather than to look ahead.

For twenty-four hours we held little more intercourse than dumb people, but the second day she came to me.

"Monsieur, would you teach me?" she asked. "Would you explain to me about the Indian dialects?"

I agreed. I threw her a blanket, which she wrapped around her, and we cowered close to the bole of a pine. I took birch bark and a crayon and turned schoolmaster, explaining that the Huron and Iroquois nations came of the same stock, but that most of the western tribes were Algonquin in blood, and that, though

they had tribal differences in speech, Algonquin was the basic language, as Latin is the root of all our tongues at home. I took the damp bark, and wrote some phrases of Algonquin, showing her the syntax as well as I had been able to reduce it to rule myself. She had a quick ear and the power of attention, but after an hour of it I tore the bark in pieces.

"We will not try this again," I told her roughly, and we scarcely met or spoke for the next day.

The fourth morning came without rain, and the sun struggled out. We built great fires, dried our clothing, repacked the canoes, and were afloat by noon. By contrast it was pleasant, but it still was cold, and we stood to our paddling. I wrapped the woman in extra blankets, and made her swallow some brandy. I hoped that she would sleep, but she did not, for it was she who called to us that there were three canoes ahead.

It showed how clogged I was by sombre thought that I had not seen them, for in a moment they swept in full sight. I crowded the woman down in the canoe, and covered her with sailcloth. Then I hailed the canoes with a long cry, "Tanipi endayenk?" which means, "Whence come you?" and added "Peca," that they might know I called in peace.

The canoes wheeled and soon hung like water birds at our side. They were filled with a hunting party of Pottawatamies, and the young braves grunted and chaffered at me in high good humor. I gave them knives and vermilion, and they talked freely. I saw them look at the draped shape in the canoe, but I shrugged my shoulders and said, "Ouskouebi!" which might mean either "drunken" or a "fool," and they grinned and seemed satisfied. They promised to report to me at La Baye des Puants, and I saw by their complaisance that the French star was at the zenith. I should have stretched my legs in comfort as I went on my way.

CHAPTER XII

A COMPACT

We paddled that afternoon till the men splashed water into the canoes, which was their way of telling me that I had worked them hard enough. It was dusk when we landed, and starlight before our kettles were hot. I had been silent, when I had not been fault finding, till, supper over, the woman, leaning across the fire, asked me why.

"Is something wrong?" she ventured. "Ever since we met the Pottawatamies you have seemed in haste."

I looked around. The men were at a distance preparing for sleep. "I wish to reach the Pottawatamie Islands before to-morrow night. Mademoiselle Starling, may I talk of our future?"

She rose. "You called me mademoiselle."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"And you mean" —

I took off my hat. "Will you come with me?" I asked, — "come where we shall not be overheard? We must talk of our future."

I knew that she trembled as she bowed her assent, but I pretended to be blind. I led the

way outside of the circle of light, then waited for her to come to me. I stood with my hat in hand, and my heart cried in pity for the woman, but my tongue was heavy as a savage's.

"I learned from the Pottawatamies," I said, "that Father Nouvel is tarrying at their islands. If we haste, we may find him there. Mademoiselle, will you marry me?"

I do not know that I was cool enough to measure rightly the space of the silence that ensued, but it seemed a long one. The woman stood very still. A star fell slanting from the mid-sky, and I watched it slip behind the horizon. The woman's head was high, and I knew that she was thinking. It troubled me that she could think at such a time.

"Mademoiselle" — I began.

"Wait!" she interrupted. She raised her hand, and her fingers looked carven white in the moonlight, though by daylight they were brown. "Monsieur, you watched the star. It went into the unknown, — a way so wide and terrible that we may not follow it even in thought. We live alone with majestic forces, — forests greater than an empire, unmapped waters, and strange, savage men. We are pygmies; yet, if we have spirit we can grow into some measure of the greatness and inflexibility around us.

Monsieur, when you asked me — what you asked me now — you were thinking of France and its standards. Of little, tidy, hedged-in France. You were not — Oh, monsieur, I am sorry you asked me that question. Of course I answer 'no,' but — but I am sorry that you asked it."

I went to her. "You are cold. Come with me to the fire. Come. The men are asleep by this time. Mademoiselle, your spirit is steel and fire, but your body betrays you. You are shivering and afraid. Yet — Well, mademoiselle, pygmies or giants, whichever we may be, we must not scorn counsel. You once called us partners. On that basis, will you listen to me now?"

"But you must not" —

"Mademoiselle, on that basis will you listen to me now?"

"Yes."

"Then come." I led her to the warmth, and placed her snugly, with logs to pillow her and her face away from the sleeping men. Then I sat beside her. But my speech had left me. I had no reasons, no persuasions at my tongue.

"Father Nouvel is at the islands," I said. "Mademoiselle, you must marry me. You must."

"Why 'must,' monsieur?"

"We cannot travel in this way."

"A week ago you thought it possible."

"I had not tried it then. It will not do."

"Monsieur, what has gone wrong?"

I took out my hunting knife and tried its edge. "My mind," I answered savagely. "Mademoiselle, I may, as you say, have tidy, circumscribed France behind my thought, but— Well, mademoiselle, I was brought up to certain observances in regard to a woman. And I cannot forget you are a woman. When the men speak roughly to you I put my hand on my sword."

"I have seen you, monsieur."

"And so I lose much thought and time conquering my anger. It fills my thought. When I taught you Indian verbs the other day the rain dripped from your hair. And I sat like a clod. What could I do? I could not shelter you for fear of rousing suspicion in the men. Mademoiselle, I cannot stand it. I must let the men know that you are a woman. And then I must marry you when we reach Father Nouvel."

She rose. "Monsieur, you must send me back to Montreal."

I kept my seat. "Mademoiselle, I have your word," I reminded. "You agreed to listen."

I had meant to plead, not to rebuke, and I regretted that she flushed. She seated herself lingeringly, but I saw that she leaned back, and

did not sit as she had done before with her muscles braced for flight.

"Why not send me back to Montreal?" she begged.

The embers of the fire fell into irregular, rectangular shapes like the stone buildings on the Marne, where I was born. My father had beggared us, but those buildings were left. I scorned my father's memory, but I had strange pride in the name and place that had been his.

"I have thought over this matter by night and day," I replied slowly. "I cannot send you to Montreal, for I cannot trust these men. If I take you myself I shall lose six weeks out of the summer. Then it will be too late to accomplish anything. No, I cannot afford so much time. The summer is all too short as it is."

"You would marry me — marry me to get me out of the way — rather than lose six weeks of time!"

I rose. "Spare your scorn, mademoiselle. This is no joust of wits. I would sell everything — except the honor of my sword — rather than lose six weeks of time."

"Then you have a mission?"

"A self-sent one, mademoiselle."

"But you can come again next year."

"Next year will be too late."

She threw out her hands. "Monsieur, try me. Let me travel with you as a man. I will be a man. I will be Monsieur Starling in truth. Try me once more."

I took her hand. "Mademoiselle, mademoiselle," I said, "think a moment. Would I force you to this marriage — would I suggest it even — if it did not seem a necessity, a necessity for my own ends? For I must have my head and hands clear. It is a selfish view. I know that. It is crushingly selfish. But it is for a large purpose. I am a small man fitted to a great undertaking, and I can permit no divided interests. I need an unhampered mind."

She walked a few steps. "And if I should travel with you as a woman and yet not marry you," she asked over her shoulder, "what then?"

I looked away. "I should be obliged to fight every man of my company first, then every white man that we might meet. It would hardly leave me with an unhampered mind, mademoiselle."

She made no comment with word or eye, and going back to the place where we had been sitting, she dropped upon the sand. I covered her shoulders with the red blanket, and again sat beside her. I would be silent till she chose to speak. After a time I went back into the forest to search fresh fuel for our fire.

When I returned with my arms laden, she turned her face toward me; her sorrowful eyes looked as if she could never again know sleep or forgetfulness. "I am a coward," she said, "yet I thought that cowardice and my desire for life had both died together. I did not draw back from the knives of the Indians, but now I am afraid of a loveless marriage. We are young. We may live many years. Oh, monsieur, I have not the courage!"

I piled the wood on the fire and did not answer. I stirred the red coals and marked how the flames slipped along the dried branches in festoons of light. Pierre was snoring, and I kicked him till he rolled over and swore in bastard French. Then I went to the woman.

"You have won," I said, and I laughed a little, — a mean, harsh laugh, my ears told me, not the laugh of a gentleman. "Mademoiselle, you have won. We start toward Montreal tomorrow. Then marry — whom you will."

She looked into my eyes. "Wait a moment;" she stopped. "Monsieur, how much time have you spent in learning the Indian dialects and preparing for this expedition?"

"Two years."

"And next year will indeed be too late?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "We waste good

hours," I suggested. "Mademoiselle, may I say 'good-night'?"

She stepped toward me. "Monsieur, do not spoil your courtesy," she begged. "I asked you a question."

I smiled at her. "The answer has lost pith and meaning. Yes, mademoiselle, next year will indeed be too late."

She put her hands before her eyes. "Then I will change my answer. Monsieur, I will marry you when we reach Father Nouvel."

But I would not reply. I walked to the beach where there were dark and stars. I ground my heel into the pebbles, and I did not hear her moccasined step behind me. She had to touch my arm.

"I meant it, monsieur," she whispered.

I raised her fingers, and laid them back against her side. "Why tempt me?" I said rudely. "Happily for you my word is a man's word. We start toward Montreal to-morrow."

"Monsieur, I beg you. Go west to-morrow."

"No, mademoiselle."

"Then — then — monsieur, I give you warning. If we start toward Montreal to-morrow I shall escape you at the first opportunity, and try my fortune alone in the woods."

"You threaten me?"

She stood in front of me. "I would bring you

to reason. Yes, I threaten you, in that I shall do what I say. Come, monsieur, I will follow you westward. Your years of preparation, your great opportunity, shall not be wasted because of me."

I took her hand. "You are a strange woman. A sage and a child; a woman and a warrior. But I will not marry you, mademoiselle."

"Why not, monsieur?"

"Because I will not hoodwink you. So long as I took you blindly against your will, I felt no shame at going about my own ends. But now that you have turned the tables on me and come without force, I cannot let you be a tool. I would not take you without telling you my plans, — and then you would not come."

"I know your plans, monsieur."

"You know that I hunt beaver."

"I know that you hunt men. Monsieur, are all the women of your nation puppets, that you should think me blind? Listen. You plan a coalition of the western tribes. La Salle's plan — with changes. You hope to make yourself a dictator, chief of a league of red men that shall control this western water-way. Is not this so, monsieur?"

"I — Yes, mademoiselle."

"You intend to form your league this summer and advance upon the Iroquois in the autumn

before the ice locks the lakes. You are in haste, for if you delay another twelvemonth you are convinced that the Iroquois will make a treaty with the Hurons at Michillimackinac, massacre your garrison there, cow the western tribes, and so wrest this country from the French. Is not this so, monsieur?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"You see that I understand all this, monsieur. Yet, I will go with you."

I did not stir. "You are acute. Yet there is one point in my plan that you did not mention," I said dully.

She turned away. "I hoped to spare us both," she returned in a tone as lifeless as my own. "Yet, if you wish words, take them. Monsieur, the Iroquois are allies of the English. Your warfare with them is but a step in pursuit of larger game. In founding an empire for your own land you would take one away from mine. You hope in the end to crush the English on this continent. Have I stated you correctly, monsieur?"

I bowed.

She laughed — a laugh more bitter than my own had been. "I am indeed the plaything of Fate," she said a little wildly. "But I will marry you. You saved my life. Yes, more. You threw your career into the balance for an un-

known man, your foe. You jeopardized all that you hoped for, and you never whined nor lost sleep. You are a superb gamester, monsieur."

I smiled. "Not enough of a gamester to accept your sacrifice, mademoiselle."

She clenched her hands. "I will marry you," she retorted. "You shall follow out your purpose. Though, after all, you cannot succeed. Who are you? A dreamer, a soldier of fortune, a man without place or following. You think slowly, and your heart rules your head. How can you hope to wrest an empire from — from us? You cannot do it. You cannot. But you shall have your chance. You gave me mine and you shall have yours. We go west. Otherwise — I have warned you, monsieur."

I seized her wrist, and made her meet my look. "That is a coward's threat," I said contemptuously.

I could not daunt her. "I mean it. I mean it, monsieur," she repeated quietly.

I stood and looked at her. "You have a man's equity," I said. "You are determined to give me my chance. Well, I will take it, — and remember that you gave it to me. But, would you have me in any way weaken my purpose, mademoiselle?"

She looked up with a flash of anger. "Am I a child or an intriguing woman? No, no. Do

your best, or your worst, or I shall despise you for your weakness. I have told you that I have scant hopes for your success, monsieur."

What could I say? I stood before her awkwardly. "Mademoiselle, may I tell you something of myself and my people? You should know what sort of name you are to bear."

But she pressed her hands outward. "No, no!" she cried. "Why tell me?" Then she sobered. "I know that you are brave and kind," she said, with her eyes down. "Beyond that — I do not think that I am interested, monsieur."

I felt angered. "You should be interested," I said bluntly. "Well, the night is slipping away. Let me lead you to the fire and bid you good-night."

Her finger tips met mine as we walked back together, but the touch was as remote as the brushing of the pine boughs on my cheek. Yet when I would have handed her her blanket and turned away, she detained me. "Sit with me a little longer, monsieur," she begged. "I — I think I am afraid of the woods to-night. Let us sit here a while."

I could not grasp her mood, but there was nothing for me but to yield to it. I made her as comfortable as possible, and saw that the fire was kept alight; then I sat near her. I was tired, but time went swiftly. My mind would

not have given my body rest, even had I lain down.

In time the woman leaned toward me. "There is — there is no woman who will suffer from this?" she asked slowly.

I stirred the fire. "I have no wife, mademoiselle."

"I did not mean that. There is no woman who — who cares for you?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"And you — and you, monsieur? There is no one whom you are giving up?"

I answered slowly. "Mademoiselle," I said, "you are a strangely wise woman. You know the value of reticence, — something few women seem to know. We have talked of many things, of ambition, of justice, of generosity, but never, never of love. Are you wise to open the past in that one matter? I have asked you no questions."

She hid her face in her hands. "But I will tell you. I was betrothed to my cousin, — to Benjamin Starling. I would not marry him now, I would not marry him now to save him from the rack. I have nothing more to tell you, monsieur."

I let the moments slip. The east was brightening, and in an hour it would be dawn. I knew we needed rest. I rose, and, standing behind the woman, bent over her.

"Mademoiselle Starling," I whispered, "tomorrow, at this time, you will be Madame Montlivet." She did not stir, and I laid my hand on her shoulder where it rose slim and sinewy as a boy's from the low neck of her squaw's dress. I bent lower. "You strange woman," I went on, marveling at her calm. "You strange woman, with the justice of a man and the tempers of a child. Have you a woman's heart, I wonder? I do not talk to you of love, but it may be that it will come to us. I will try to be good to you, Mary Starling. Carry that promise with you when I say good-night."

And then she trembled. "Wait, wait, monsieur! There is one word first. I have tried — I have tried to say it."

I knelt beside her. "What would you say to me, mademoiselle?"

But she turned away. "Monsieur, monsieur! I will marry you, yes. But it is to save your hopes, — your future. We have — we have no love. Monsieur, will you not hold me as your guest, your sister? It is I who would kneel to you, monsieur."

I pushed her down. "Sit still," I commanded. I turned my back to her, for I had no speech. She did not plead, but I could feel her tremble. I forced words out of me.

"You are a Protestant?"

"Yes, monsieur."

I picked up the corner of her blanket. "I am a Catholic," I said, drawing away the woolen folds that I might look at her. "In our church marriage is a sacrament, mademoiselle."

She lifted her great eyes. "Monsieur, our marriage will be no sacrament. It will be a political contract. A marriage — a marriage of convenience — in name only — Surely when we reach home it can be annulled. Must I — must I beg of you, monsieur?"

I rose and looked down at her. "A strange woman of a strange race," I said. "No, you need not beg of me. I have never had a captive in my life, — not even a bird. Mademoiselle, you shall bear my name, if you are willing, for your protection, but you shall go as my guest to Montreal." And I left her in her red blanket and went away.

CHAPTER XIII

WE REACH THE ISLANDS

THE dawn came with an uprush of unclouded light showing burnished green leaves and dancing water. I bowed my head to the woman's hand to bid her good-morning, and I served her with meal cakes and sweet water from a maple tree. I was reckless of Pierre's eyes, though I knew them to be weasel sharp for certain sides of life. The woman answered me but scantily, and when we were embarked sat quiet in the bottom of the canoe. I forbore to look at her.

The men feared my mood that day, so paddled well. I charged them not to speak nor sing, for I would have no wasted breath, and the sombre shore, pine and tamarack and savage rock, passed before us like pictures dropping from a roll. Toward sunset I sighted a canoe full of warriors, and when we drew near I saw that they were Pottawatamies.

"Are we near your islands?" I hailed.

The men bowed toward the southwest. "The space of the star rising, and you will reach them if you travel," spoke the tallest. "You ride

fast. I have seen you come like the white squall on the water."

I called again. "Does Father Nouvel tarry with you?" I cried.

I thought that they looked at the maid in the canoe. "He tarries," they answered.

I gave the signal and we slipped away. "To the shore," I commanded, and the two canoes took new vigor. The men, like stall-fed beasts, spurred themselves by the prospect of eating and idleness, and we were soon at the beach. I bent over the woman.

"Be prepared," I whispered. "I must tell the men. If I play the clown it is but to impress them, mademoiselle."

She met my glance with a look of entire understanding, and rising gave me her finger tips and stepped from the canoe. I do not know how she turned all in one instant from a sunburned stripling to a great lady, but that was what occurred. The men, stretching themselves as they stepped to the shore, stopped and stared. I saw that I must speak quickly.

"Let the canoes alone," I said. "We will stop here but a moment. Go — all of you — and gather green twigs and young ferns, and flowers if you can find them. Then bring them to me here. Go."

The men stood as jointless as tin images.

But I saw that they were not only dumfounded but afraid, so I laid my hand on my sword, to give them better cause for their stupefaction. "Go!" I shouted again, and so perverse is my nature that, though I knew well I had no cause for merriment, I swallowed hard to keep back a smile.

The woman and I stood alone while the men jerked their way like automatons from bush to tree. The chaos of their minds had numbed their muscles, and they stripped the young boughs clumsily like a herd of browsing moose. I did not look at the woman. I knew that she needed all my courtesy, but it was hard to speak to her just then.

The men wandered for perhaps five minutes, then ranged themselves before me. They bore, a curious collection of grasses, mutilated tamarack boughs, and crushed brakes. They eyed my sword hilt, and looked ready for flight. Yet I was master, and they remembered it. Had I ordered them to eat the fodder that they bore, they would not have spoken, and I think that they would have endeavored to obey.

I pointed to the canoe where the woman was accustomed to sit. "Place the greens there," I said. "Make a carpet of them where the red blanket is lying. Work quickly, — then come here. No talking."

They obeyed. They dressed the canoe like a river barge on a fête day, and again they lined themselves before me. I took the woman by the hand.

"You have decked the canoe for my wedding journey," I said, and all my perverse inner merriment suddenly died. "This traveler, whom you have known as a man, is Mademoiselle Marie Starling and my promised wife. We are to be married when we reach the Pottawatamie Islands. She is your future mistress, and you may come and touch her hand and swear to serve her as faithfully as you have served me. Pierre, you may come first."

A man who has seen battle knows that the pang of a bullet can clear even a peasant's clogged brain. The churls took this blow in silence and tried to make something out of it. What they made I could not fathom, but it lifted them out of themselves, for after a moment they raised their eyes and came forward like men. I had never seen them in an equal guise; I could have grasped them by the hand had it been wise.

The woman extended her palm to them, and gave them each a word as they passed in review. She was gracious, she was smiling, yet somehow she was negligent. I was not prepared that she should be used to homage. Perhaps I had

thought that this bit of vassalage would give her pleasure. She treated it like an old tale.

"Enough," I ordered "Pierre, you may draw a portion of brandy all around and drink to the health of your mistress. Then we shall get under way."

Pierre's portions were always ample, and the western red was dulling by the time we were again afloat. I did not paddle, but seated myself beside the woman on the crushed leaves and watched in inactivity and silence while the starlight came. As the dusk deepened we slipped by strange islands, but I held the canoes straight in advance till a limestone headland rose white out of the blurred, violet water. The star shine showed a deep bay and wavering lights among the trees. I touched the woman's shoulder.

"The largest of the Pottawatamie Islands," I explained. "I have had maps. Pray God we may find what we seek."

The canoes bumped and slid upward on the sand, and I left the men on guard, and taking the woman's hand led her toward the lights. A rabble of dogs trooped upon us and gave tongue, and black shapes, arrow-laden, clustered out of the wigwams.

"Peca," I cried, in greeting, and again, "Where is your chief? Where is Onanguissé?"

A French voice answered, "Who calls?" The mat that hung before the entrance of the nearest lodge was pulled aside, and smoke and red light flared out of the opening. I saw the black robe of a priest!

"Father Nouvel, Father Nouvel!" I cried like a schoolboy. "You are indeed here!"

The priest stooped to pass through the skin-draped opening, and came peering into the starlight.

"Who calls Father Nouvel?" he demanded in a mellow voice, rich in intonations. "What, an Indian woman, monsieur! Who are you? What means this?"

I led the woman forward. "Father Nouvel, this is Mademoiselle Starling, an Englishwoman who was captured by the Indians. We have traveled fast and far to find you. Can you marry us at once?"

It was badly done. I had jumbled my speech without wit or address, like a peasant dragging his milkmaid before the village curé. The woman may have felt my clumsiness. She dropped my hand, and curtsied deeply to the father, and he, staring, checked the hand that he had raised to extend to her, and bowed deeply in turn. It was a meeting, not of priest and refugee, but of a man and woman who had known the world. Father Nouvel was very old and his skin was

wrinkled ivory, but at this moment he wore his cassock as if it were a doublet slashed with gold. His command was an entreaty.

"Come nearer, daughter. I wish to see your face."

She followed him close to the flaring light that poured from the wigwam, and he looked at her as unsparingly as if she were a portrait of paint and oil.

"I have never seen you," he decided. "Yet the name Starling, — it is unusual, and it brings troubling memories to my mind."

The woman deliberated a moment. She was indeed a woman with wit that did not need mine, and I felt it to be so, and I stood at one side, and thought out my own conclusions. She looked up. "At Meudon?" she suggested to the priest.

He smote his palms together. "I am old," he mourned. "Else I could never have forgotten. At Meudon, of course. It was at a meeting of Jacobites. An exile named Starling — he was a commanding man, my daughter — was their leader. How did you know?"

She stood there in her Indian dress of skins with a forest around her and talked of courts.

"I remembered that you were in Paris three years ago," she explained, "and that our king — yes, our king, Father Nouvel, although a king in

exile — talked sometimes with you. There was often one of your order at the meetings at Meudon."

The father looked at her. "I could almost think that age and loneliness have undone my mind," he said slowly. "You talk of kings and courtiers. Who are you?"

I waited, perhaps more eagerly than the priest himself, for her reply. None came. I thought she gave a flitting look toward me, and so I shrugged my shoulders and thrust myself again into the priest's thought.

"If we were kings, courtiers, and Jacobites all in one," I said as airily as might be in view of my aching muscles, "the titles would yet clink dully as leaden coins, travel-worn as we are. Can you marry us this evening, Father Nouvel?"

He looked at me keenly, not altogether pleased.

"And you are" — he asked.

"Armand de Montlivet, from Montreal."

He relaxed somewhat. "I have heard of you. No, I cannot marry you to-night. I will find a lodge for this demoiselle, and we will talk of this to-morrow. Come now and let me bring you to the chief," and with a beckoning of the hand he led the way into the lodge behind him.

We followed closely. The lodge was large, and was roofed and floored with rush mats. The smoke hung in a cloud over our heads, but

the air around us was sufficiently clear for us to see, — though with some rubbing of the eyes. An aged Indian sat close to the blaze, and Father Nouvel walked over to him.

"Onanguissé," he said, "two strangers lift the mat before your door, — strangers with white faces. Do you bid them take broth and shelter?"

The old chief nodded. He had lacked curiosity to look out at us while we had stood talking before his door, and now he scarcely lifted his eyes.

"Is the Huron with them?" he asked the priest.

I pushed forward. "What Huron?" I demanded, in the Pottawatamie speech.

The chief stirred somewhat at hearing me use his language. "A Huron is in the woods," he said indifferently. "Every one must live, thieves as well as others, but I do not like it that he stole our squashes. When a Huron comes, you will soon see the French."

I would have asked questions, for I craved more news, but before the words could form, since I am slow, the woman spoke.

"Nadouk!" she exclaimed. "I understand that word. It means Huron. Are the Hurons pursuing us?"

Her woman's voice echoed oddly in that

smoke-grimed place. Onanguissé looked up. I have lived among Indians, and know some sides of their nature, but I am never prepared for what they may do. The old chief stared and then rose. "A white thrush!" he said, and he looked at Father Nouvel for explanation.

"They come to be married," the priest hastened. "Have you an empty lodge for the maiden?"

Onanguissé listened, then walked to the woman, and looked at her as he would study a blurred trail in the forest. She bore his scrutiny well, and he grunted approval. Now that he had risen he was impressive. He was tall, and had that curious, loose-jointed suppleness that, I have heard women say, comes only from gentle blood. As he stood beside Father Nouvel it came to me that the two men were somewhat kin. One face was patrician and the other savage, but they were both old men who bore their years with wisdom and kept the salt of humor close at hand. The chief turned to me.

"To marry? It is the moon of flowers, and the birds are mating. It is well. The white thrush shall sleep in my lodge to-night. I will go elsewhere. Come," and pointing to the door, he would have driven the priest and myself outside without more words.

I glanced around. The lodge was unex-

pectedly neat, and though I dreaded to leave the woman in the smoke, I knew it was unwise to protest. Would she be willing to stay? She was often ruled by impulse, and it would be like her to clamor for the clean starlight. I told her, in short phrase, what the chief had said. "And I beg you to show as little repugnance as possible," I added.

She listened without showing me her eyes, which were always the only index I had to what was in her mind.

"Thank the chief for his hospitality," she rejoined, and she looked toward Onanguissé, and bowed with a pretty gesture of acceptance. Then she walked over to me.

"When you thought me a man," she said hurriedly, and in a tone so low that only I could hear, "you trusted somewhat to my judgment, — even though you saw me fail. When you found me a woman, you trusted less, and since — since you arranged to marry me, you have assumed that I would fail you at every turn. Ours is a crooked road, monsieur, and there are many turns ahead. If you burden your mind so heavily with me you cannot attend to what is your real concern. Trust me more. Think less about me. I will show no irritation, no initiative, and I will follow where you point. I should like to think that you would rest to-night,

— rest care free. I wish you good-night, monsieur."

She had spoken with a hurry of low-toned words that left me no opening, and now she turned away before my tongue was ready to serve my mind. She bowed us to the door, and the rush mat fell between us. I watched the old chief stalk away and wondered what was in his mind.

"Is this the first white woman he has seen?" I asked the priest.

Father Nouvel smiled reflectively at the retreating back. "Oh, no," he replied. "He has been in Quebec. He is the chief you must have heard quoted, who vaunted that God had made three great men, — La Salle, Frontenac, and himself. He is a crafty man and able. You see that he never squanders strength nor words. No, monsieur, you must not follow me." He stopped to lay a hand on my shoulder. "Take heed, my son. Ox that you look to be for endurance, there are yet lines under your eyes. I will not talk to you to-night. Sleep well. I take it for granted that you prefer to sleep as I do, under the stars." And putting out his thin, ivory hand in blessing, he went away.

But I was not ready for sleep. I went to the canoes, sent the men to rest, and found food which I carried to the woman, and left, with a whis-

pered word, outside her door. Then I ate some parched corn, and lighting my pipe, lay down to take counsel of what had befallen me. I lay at some distance from the woman's lodge, but not so far but that I could see the rush mat that hung before it. The Indians watched me, but kept at a distance. I saw that Onanguissé had given commands.

I had so much to work out in my mind that I thought sleep would come slowly, but I remember nothing from the moment when I bolstered my head in my arms till I found the moon shining in my face. It had been starlight when I went to sleep, I remembered, and I raised my eyelids warily. A wild life teaches the dullest to know when he has been wakened by some one watching him. And I knew it now.

The world was white light and thick shadow. Wigwams, dogs, stumps, trees, sleeping Indians, I counted them in turn. Then I saw more. A pine tree near me had too thick a trunk. That was what I had expected. I let my eyes travel cautiously upward till they met the shining points of eyes watching me.

I lay and looked, and the eyes looked in return. I did not dare glance away and the Indian would not, so we stared like basilisks. It was not an heroic position, and having a white man's love for open action, I had to argue with myself

to keep from letting my sword whistle. But fighting with savages is not open nor heroic. It is tedious, oblique, often uninteresting, and frequently fatal. I was unwilling to lose my head just then. So I lay still. If this were the Huron, he was probably merely reconnoitring, as I had reason to believe he had done several times before. His game interested me, for he seemed to work unnecessarily hard for meagre returns, and Indians are seldom spendthrifts of endeavor. I could accomplish nothing by capturing him, for I should learn nothing. There was ostensible peace between the Huron nation and myself. I would let him work out his plans till he did something that I could lay hold of. Yet I would not look away. I had grown very curious to see his face.

I do not know how it would have ended, or whether dawn would have found us still staring like barnyard cats, for chance, and a dog, suddenly settled the matter. The dog, a forlorn, flea-driven cur, snuffed the fresh trail, followed it to the tree, and snarled out a shout of protest. He snarled but once. The Indian drew his knife, stooped, and I heard the sound of tearing hide and spouting blood. It was only a dog, but I cursed myself for not having been quicker.

And so I sat up. I was forced to shift my eyes for an instant in order to pick up my musket,

which, secure in a friendly camp, I had dropped at a careless arm's length from me on the ground. When I looked again the Indian was gone. I went to the tree. The Indian had had but an instant, but he had secured himself out of reach of my eyesight; had faded into the background as a partridge screens itself behind mottled leaves. If I followed him, a knife would be slipped out at me from behind stump or tree trunk, and the dog might not have burial alone.

I went to the dog and stirred him with my sword point. He was a noisome heap, but I knew that I must overcome my repugnance and bury him, or I should have to explain the whole tale to the camp at dawn. And explanation would take time and was not necessary. The Huron was following me, and had no quarrel with the Pottawatamies. When I departed on the morrow he would undoubtedly retie his sandals and continue the voyage. A wife and a ghost! Two traveling guests I had not reckoned with in planning this expedition. I shrugged, and stooped to spit the dog upon my sword, when I saw a skin pouch lying blood-bathed at the creature's side. It was a bag such as savages wear around their necks, and the Indian had probably let it fall when he stooped to kill the dog.

I seized it, careless of the smearing of my

fingers, and took it to the moonlight. It was made of the softest of dressed doeskin, and embroidered in red porcupine quills with the figure of a beaver squatting on a rounded lodge. I had seen that design before. It was the totem sign of the house of the Baron, and this bag had hung from Pemaou's neck that day when he danced between me and the sunset and flung the war spear at my heart.

I felt myself grow keenly awake and alive. So it was Pemaou who was following. Well, I had told him that we should meet again. I untied the strings of the bag and turned its contents into my handkerchief. There was an amulet in the form of a beaver's paw, a twist of tobacco, a flint, a tin looking-glass, and a folded sheet of birch bark. I stopped a moment. Should I look further? It was wartime and I was dealing with a savage. I unfolded the bark and pressed it open in my palm. There, boldly drawn in crayon, was a head in profile; it was the profile of the woman who lay in the lodge, and whose mat-hung door I was guarding. Yes, it was her profile, and it was one that no man could forget, though when I speak of a straight nose and an oddly rounded chin, they are but words to fit a thousand faces.

I refolded the bark, put it in my pocket, and buried the dog. Then I sat down before the

woman's wigwam. I had one point to work on in my speculations. No Indian would draw a head in profile, for he would be superstitious about creating half of a person. I slept no more that night.

CHAPTER XIV

A PROVISIONAL BARGAIN

I BEGAN my day as early as I thought it wise to disturb the sleepers around me, and by the time the sun was two hours high I had accomplished several things. I had confessed to the priest, had had a clean lodge of green boughs built for the woman, and had bargained and bantered with the Indians, and blustered over them with knowledge of their language till they accorded me reluctant grins. They had a village of seven or eight hundred souls, and I found them a marked people. They were cleaner than any savages I had seen, — the women were modest and almost neat, — and their manners had a somewhat European air. I judged them to be politicians rather than warriors, for the braves, though well shaped and wiry, lacked the look of ferocious hardihood that terrified white men in the Iroquois race. But I found them keen traders.

One purchase that I made took time. I wished a new suit of skins for the woman, and I went from lodge to lodge, searching and brow-beating and dangling my trinkets till I was ready to join

with the squaws in their laughter at my expense. But my purchase once completed pleasured me greatly. I had found it a little here and a little there, and it was worthy any princess of the woods. I had gathered blouse, skirt, leggings, and moccasins, all new, and made of white dressed deerskin pliable as velvet to the hand. They looked to me full of feminine bravery. The leggings and moccasins were beaded and quill broidered, and the skirt was fringed and trimmed with tiny hawk's bells.

I took the garments to the green lodge, laid them out in order, saw that there were trenchers of fresh water, and brought what conveniences we had from the canoe. The pity of the situation came upon me hard. I had to be father and friend,—lover I could not be. The woman had great self-control, but she would need it. Well, I could trust her to do her best. I went to find her.

As yet I had not said good-morning to her, although I had seen her from the distance, and knew that she had breakfasted and had talked with Father Nouvel. She was sitting now under a beech tree on the headland, and when I bent before her she shook her head.

"It is not real," she said, with a look over water and forest. "It is all a dream."

I stopped to send a group of curious squaws

upon their way. It was indeed like a pictured spectacle, — the green wood, the Indian village, and the headland-guarded bay opening northward over rolling water.

"Yes, it is a dream," I agreed. "You will soon wake. Where would you like the wakening to take place, mademoiselle? At Meudon?"

She looked up with a smile. "What would you like to know about me?" she asked, with a sober directness, which, like her smile, was friendly and brave. "You heard something last night. I am entirely willing to tell you more. But is it not wise for us to know as little as possible about each other?"

"Why, mademoiselle?"

She hesitated. "As we stand now," she explained slowly, "we have no past nor future. We live in a fantasy. We are cold and hungry, but life is so strange that we forget our bodies. It is all as unreal as a mirage. When it is over, we part. If we part knowing nothing of each other, it will all seem like a dream."

I thought a moment. "Then you think that we must guard against growing interested in each other, mademoiselle?"

She looked at me gravely. "Yes. Do you not think so, monsieur? 'Friends for the night's bivouac.' Those were your words."

Now was here a woman who felt deeply and talked lightly? I had not met such. "It is wise," I rejoined, "but difficult." I took the crayon from my pocket and began drawing faces on the white limestone rock at my side. I drew idly and scowled at my work. "The Indians can do better," I lamented. "Was your cousin, Benjamin Starling, clever with his pencil, mademoiselle?"

She drew back, but she answered me fairly. "Very clever," she said quietly. "It was a talent. Why do you ask, monsieur?"

"I find myself thinking of him." I dropped the crayon. "Listen, mademoiselle. I must ask you some questions. Believe me, I have reasons. Now as to your cousin, — is he alive?"

She looked off at the water. "I do not know, monsieur."

She had become another woman. I hated Benjamin Starling that his name could so instantly sap the life from her tone.

"Please look at me," I begged irritably. "Mademoiselle, I think that I must ask you to tell me more, — to tell me much more."

She rose. "Is it necessary?"

I bowed. "Else I should not ask it. Please sit, mademoiselle."

She sat where my hand pointed. "You know that we were Tories," she began, in the quiet

monotone I had learned to expect from her under stress, "and that our family followed King James to France. My parents died. I had no brothers or sisters, and so, a year ago, I came to the Colonies where I had friends. Later, my cousin followed, and we were betrothed. We had the same cause at heart, and our joint estates would give us some power. We planned to use them for that purpose."

"And your capture? Did your cousin know of it?"

"Monsieur, you say that this is necessary? My nurse had come to America, and married a settler, in a village on the frontier. She was ill, and I went to see her, and stayed some days. My cousin followed, and stayed at a neighboring house. One night the Indians came. The woman's husband was away, and the little maid-servant ran at the first outcry. I was alone with the woman, who could not leave her bed. I cut my hair roughly, put on a suit of her husband's clothing, and took a musket. It was a blockhouse, and I hoped that I might hold the Indians off for a time if they thought me a man."

"And your cousin?"

"He came to me. He was running. He said it was of no use. He had seen men brained. There were legions of Indians. He said there

was nothing left but flight. He tried to take me with him."

"And when you would not go? When you would not desert?"

"Monsieur, he went alone."

I laid myself down on the grass before her, and covered her hands with mine. "I am not quite a brute," I said. "I had to ask it. Look, look, mademoiselle, it is all over. See, the sky is gentle, and the Indians are friendly, and my sword — Well, I will not leave you, mademoiselle, until you tell me to go. But I must say more. Your cousin — Is he Lord Starling?"

"Yes."

"Lord Starling is probably alive. If he is, he is searching for you. Have you thought of that?"

"But the wilderness, — the terrible leagues of wilderness! He could not track me, monsieur."

"When there is money and influence, even the wilderness has messengers. He was close to the person of James. Is he a Catholic?"

"He professed it, monsieur."

I shook my head. "You are very bitter. You need not be. He was insane that night. I have known the sight of Indian butchery to turn good men into whimpering animals. He was not responsible. I know that he is lavish-

ing time and fortune and strength to find you now."

I thought she winced. "You know this, monsieur?"

It was my turn to look away. "I know something of a man's heart," I answered deliberately. "If I loved you, mademoiselle, and lost you — lost you, and played the craven, — I should find you. The wilderness would not matter. I should find you. I should find you, and retrieve myself — some way. Lord Starling has wit and daring, else he would not be an exile, else you would not have promised to marry him. Be assured that he is following you, and is probably not far behind. Do you want him to find you, mademoiselle?"

I turned with the last word, and looked her full in the face. It was a stupid trick, but it served. I had her answer.

"There!" I cried, and I laughed a little jerkily. "Never mind. Don't answer. We have talked enough, mademoiselle. We will be married at noon to-day. Ah, you never loved him, else, no matter what he had done, you could never look as you look now. Wherever he is, or whatever kind of man he may be, I do him no wrong in giving you my name to-day." I took the pictured birch bark from my pocket, and tore it in fine strips. "A useless map," I

said in explanation. "Mademoiselle, may I have your finger to measure?"

She gave me her hand, and I circled her finger with a grass blade, and warned her that the ring that I should give her would be almost as crude. She was trying to keep herself from asking questions, and was going to succeed. I liked that. It was useless to terrify her with fables of prowling Indians, and profiles on bark. And then, what was there to tell? I knew at once too much and too little. I took some bent gold wire from my pocket, and showed it to her.

"I am going to plait it into a braid for the ring," I said. "I think that I can file the ends, and make it serve. It is all I have. I wear no jewelry, and would not give you one of the brass rings we use in trade. This is at least gold."

She watched me straighten the kinks in the wire. "You took that from something you valued," she said. "I will wear the brass ring. Surely you can replace this wire where it belongs."

I shook my head. "It was a filigree frame," I volunteered.

I had spoken with as little thought as a dog barks, and quite as witlessly. I knew that as soon as I heard my words. I looked at the woman. But she was not going to question me.

"If it was a frame, it held a miniature," she said quietly. "Please twist the wire around it again. I prefer the brass ring."

"Because?"

"I would not rob any one. If you have carried the picture all these leagues, it is a token from some one you love; some one who loves you. I have no part in that."

I went on plaiting the wire. "The woman of the miniature will know no robbery," I said, "because she knew no possession. Mademoiselle, you seem in every way to be a woman with whom it is wisest to have a clear understanding."

"You need tell me nothing."

"It is better to tell the whole, now that you have stumbled on a part. I was nothing to that woman whose face I carried with me. She did not know I had the picture. I might never have told her. It was nothing, you see. It was all in a man's mind, and the man now has sterner matters to fill his thought. I would like you to wear this ring."

"Why not the other?"

I laughed at her a little. "I shall try not to give you spurious metal, — even granted that our bargain is provisional. Now, mademoiselle, may I take you to the lodge I have had made? In two hours we are to be married."

She followed at my side, and I took her to the lodge, and pointed her within. She glanced at what I had done, and I saw her bite her lip. She turned to me without a smile.

"It all makes it harder," she said indefinitely. "Harder to think of the wrong that I am doing you and the other woman."

I cannot abide misapprehension. We were alone. "Wait!" I begged. "Mademoiselle, you cannot probe a man's thought. Often he cannot probe his own. But I am not unhappy. A man marries many brides, and Ambition, if the truth be told, is, perhaps, the dearest. I shall embrace her. You should be able to understand."

"But the woman. She must have seen that you loved her. She may have cared more in return than you knew."

I looked at her. "The lady of the miniature," I said slowly, "had many lovers. If she showed me special favor, I assure you I did not know. But even if her fancy did stray toward me, — which I think it did not, — why, she was — She was a winsome, softly smiling, gentle lady, mademoiselle. She was not fire, and spirit, and courage, and loyalty, and temper, and tenderness. No, she was not in the least like that. I think that she would soon forget. Have we dropped this subject forever, mademoiselle?"

She made me a grave curtsy. "Till we reach Montreal," she promised, and she did not raise her eyes.

We were married at noon. The altar stood under an oak tree, and the light sifted in patterns on the ground. I wore satin, and ribbon, and shining buckle, for I carried those gewgaws in my cargo, but my finery did not shame my bride's attire. She stood proud, and rounded, and supple in her deerskins, and a man might have gloried in her. Seven hundred Indians, glistening like snakes with oil and vermilion, squatted around us, but they held themselves as lifeless as marionettes. It was so still that I heard the snore of a sleeping dog and the gulls in the harbor squawking over a floating fish. Father Nouvel spoke very slowly. This was a real marriage, a sacrament, to him.

As we turned from the ceremony, Onanguissé came forward. He was not painted, but he wore a mantle of embroidered buffalo skin, and his hair, which was dressed high with eagle's feathers, was powdered with down from the breasts of white gulls. He stood in front of the woman.

"Listen," he said. "I speak to the white thrush. She cannot understand my words, but her heart has called to my heart, and that will teach her to know my meaning. Brethren, bear witness. An eagle cares naught for a partridge,

but an eagle calls to an eagle though there be much water and many high rocks between. You know the lodge of Onanguissé. It has fire, but no warmth. I am old, and age needs love to warm it, but I am alone. First my wife, then my two sons, last of all, at the time the chestnuts were in blossom, my daughter Mimi, — the Master of Life called them one by one. I have washed my face, and I have combed my hair, yet who can say I have not mourned? My life has been as dead as the dried grass that thatches the muskrat's lodges. When have any of you seen Onanguissé smile? Yet think not that I stretch out my hands to the country of souls. I will live, and sit at the council fire till many of you who are before me have evaporated like smoke from a pipe. For I am of the race of the bear, and the bear never yields while one drop of blood is left. And the Master of Life has been kind. He has brought me at last a woman who has an eagle's eyesight and a bear's endurance. She is worthy to be of my family. I have waited for such an one. Her speech is strange, but her blood answers mine. It is idle to mourn. I will replace the dead with the living. This woman shall be no more the white thrush. She shall be Mimi, the turtle dove, the daughter of Onanguissé. Brethren, bear witness. Mimi is no longer dead. She

stands here." He stepped closer to the woman. "I give you this cloak that you may wrap me in your memory," he went on. "I hereby confirm my words;" and thereupon, he threw over her shoulders a long, shining mantle made of the small skins of the white hare. It was a robe for an empress.

I stepped forward, then stood still, and resolved to trust the woman as she had asked.

"You are adopted," I prompted softly, with no motion of my lips.

She understood. Wrapped in her white cloak, she curtsied low before Onanguissé. Then she turned to me. "Tell him," she said, "that my heart is wiser than my tongue; the one is dumb, but the other answers. Say to him that I see his face, and it tells me that he has lived wisely and with honor. I am now of his family. I, too, will strive to live wisely, that he need not be shamed. Say to him that I will not forget." She stopped with her glance upon the old chief, and her eyes held something I had not seen in them before. With me, their self-reliance had sometimes been hard, almost provocative, as if the spirit behind them defied the world to break it down. But as she met this kindness — this kindness that was instinctive, and not a matter of prudence or reason — all hardness vanished, and her dignity was almost wistful. I thought of my

mother, the saddened head of a great house, who had seen the ruin of home and heart, but whose spirit would not die. Something in this woman's face, as she stood silent, suddenly gave me back the vision of my mother as I had seen her last. I looked with my heart beating hard. The hush lasted fully a moment, then the woman drew her cloak closer, curtsied again, and walked back to her green lodge.

I turned to the chief, and would have translated what had been said, but after the first phrase, he motioned me to silence. "She has taken my robe. She has become of my family. That is sufficient." He lifted his calumet, and went to give orders for the feasting.

So the priest and I stood alone. He looked at me, and shook his head. His mouth was smiling, but I saw him brush at his eyes. "You have married a woman of great spirit, monsieur," he said, with a touch of his hand on my sleeve. "They are rare, — most rare." He stopped. "Yet the roedeer is not made for the paddock," he said impersonally.

I laughed, and it sounded exultant. I felt the blood hammer in my temples. "Nor can the thrush be tamed to sit the finger like the parrakeet," I completed. "I understand that, Father Nouvel."

The wedding feast followed. Madame de

Montlivet, the priest, Onanguissé, and I sat in a semicircle on the ground, and slaves served us with wooden trenchers of food. We each had our separate service, like monks in a refectory, but we were not treated with equal state, for the woman drank from a copper-trimmed ladle, made from the polished skull of a buffalo, while my cup was a dried gourd. We ate in ceremonial silence, and were sunk in our own thoughts. There was food till the stomach sickened at its gross abundance: whitefish, broth, sagamité, the feet of a bear, the roasted tail of a beaver. I watched the slaves bring the food and bear it away, and I said to myself that I was sitting at my wedding feast, — a feast to celebrate a false marriage.

After the feast, the calumet was danced before us. Still there was silence between the woman and myself as we sat side by side. I wondered if she realized that this strange dance was still further confirmation of what we had done; that it was part of the ceremony of our marriage. It was a picture as unreal, as incomprehensible, as the fate we had invited. The sun was westering, and shone full upon the dancing braves. Their corded muscles and protruding eyes made them ghastly as tortured wretches of some red-lit inferno. There was no laughter nor jesting. The kettle-drum rum-

bled like water in a cave, and the chant of the singers wailed, and died, and wailed again. And this was for my wedding. I looked down at the woman's hand that bore my ring, and saw that the strong, nervous fingers were gripped till they were bloodless. What was she thinking? I tried to meet her look, but it was rapt and awed. A wave of heat ran through me; the wild music beat into my blood. This savage ritual that I had looked at with alien eyes suddenly took to itself the dignity of the terrible wilderness that bound us. The pageantry of its barbarism seized upon me; it was a fitting setting for one kind of marriage, — not a marriage of flowers and dowry, but the union of two great, stormy hearts who, through clash and turmoil, had found peace at last. But ours was a mock marriage, and we had not found peace. My breath choked me. I leaped to my feet, and begged Onanguissé to end the ceremony, and let me do my share. I knew what was my part as bridegroom, and Pierre and Labarthe were waiting with their arms laden. I distributed hatchets, Brazil tobacco, and beads from Venice. Then I turned to Onanguissé.

"We go to the land of the Malhominis, to the wild rice people. They live toward the southwest?"

He nodded. "Across La Baye des Pùants

as the wild goose flies. Then down till you find the mouth of the wild rice river. But why go till another sunrise?"

I hesitated. But I thought of the shadowing Huron, and decided that I could elude him best at night. "We are in haste," I told Onanguissé, and I pointed the men toward their work.

But before I myself had time to step toward the canoes, I felt the woman's touch upon my arm. Though, in truth, it was odd that I felt it, for the movement was light as the brushing of a grass stalk.

"Monsieur, do we go now?" she asked. "You have had no opportunity for council with these Indians, yet I see that they are powerful."

She was watching my interests. I laid my fingers on hers, and looked full at her as I had not done since we had been man and wife. Her eyes were mournful as they often were, but they were starry with a thought I could not read. The awe and the wonder were still there, and her fingers were unsteady under mine. I dropped to my knees.

"I have done more than you saw," I said, with my eyes on hers. "I have talked with Onanguissé, and have smoked a full pipe with the old men in council. Thank you for your interest. Thank you, Madame de Montlivet."

But she would not look at me bent before her. "That I wish you to do your best, unhampered by me, does not mean that I wish you success," she said, with her head high, and she went to Onanguissé, and curtsied her adieus. Her last words were with Father Nouvel, and she hid her eyes for a moment, while he blessed her and said good-by.

Our canoes pointed to the sunset as we rounded the headland and slid outward. On the shore, the Indian women chanted a hymn to Messou, — to Messou, the Maker of Life, and the God of Marriage, to whom, on our behalf, many pipes had been smoked that day.

CHAPTER XV

I TAKE A NEW PASSENGER

Now the great bay on which we were embarked was a water empire, fair to the eye, but tricky of wind and current. La Baye des Puants the French called it, from the odor that came at seasons from the swamps on the shore, and it ran southwest from Lake Illinois. The Pottawatamie Islands that we had just left well-nigh blocked its mouth, and its southern end was the outlet of a shining stream that was known as the River of the Fox. The bay was thirty leagues long by eight broad, and had tides like the ocean. Five tribes dwelt around it: the Pottawatamies at its mouth, the Malhominis halfway down on its western shore, and the Sacs, the Chippewas, and the Winnebagoes scattered at different points in more transitory camps. To the east the bay was separated from Lake Illinois by a long peninsula that lay like a rough-hewn arrow with its point to the polestar. It was goodly land, I had been told, rich in game, and splashed with ponds, but since it was too small to support the hunting of a tribe it was left comparatively unoccupied. All of the five tribes, and sometimes

the Miamis, fished there at intervals; it was neutral ground. I told all this to the woman as our canoes swept toward the sunset.

She sat with her back to the west, and the sun, that dazzled my eyes, shone red through her brown hair, and I scorned myself that I should have believed for a moment that such soft, fine abundance ever framed a man's forehead. I talked to her freely; talked of winds and tides and Indians, and was not deterred when she answered me but sparingly. I could not see her face distinctly, because of the light, but there was something in the gentleness and intentness of her listening poise that made me feel that she welcomed the safeguard of my aimless speech, but that for the moment she had no similar weapons of her own.

So long as daylight lasted, we traveled swiftly toward the southwest, but when the sunset had burned itself to ashes, and the sky had blurred into the tree line, I told the men to shift their paddles, and drift for a time. The last twenty-four hours had hardened them to surprise. They obeyed me as they did Providence, — as a troublesome, but all-powerful enigma.

And so we floated, swinging like dead leaves on the long swells. The stars came out, the gulls went shoreward for the night, and we were

as alone as if on the sea. The woman's slender figure, wrapped in her white cloak, became a silent, shining wraith. She was within touch of my hand, yet unreachably remote. I lost my glib speech. The gray loneliness that one feels in a crowd came over me. If I had been alone with my men, I should have felt well accompanied, master of my craft, and in tune with my condition. It was the presence of this alien woman, whom I must protect, but not approach, that made me realize that I was thousands of leagues from my own kind, and that I must depend on my own judgment — with which I felt much out of conceit —to carry this expedition safely through the barbarous wilderness. I shook myself, and told my men to pick up their paddles.

But we were to travel no more toward the southwest that night. My plan was to turn back, paddle due east, and reach the peninsula before the late moonrise. This doubling on my track was to cheat Pemaou if he were indeed pursuing. Then I was planning to make the peninsula my headquarters for a time. I had left word at the islands that I was on my way to confer with the Malhominis, but I had not committed myself as to where I should make my permanent camp. I hoped, in this game of hide and seek, to shake off the Huron, and leave

the woman in safe hiding while I went on my mission from tribe to tribe.

And so I told the men to work with muffled paddles. I thought the precaution somewhat unnecessary, but took it as a matter of form. Now that I was in action again, I felt in command of the situation. And then, from some shadowy distance, I heard the splash of a pursuing oar.

I commanded silence, and we craned into the darkness, and listened. We all heard it. The sound came as regularly as a heart-beat, and it was no muffled stroke. The oarsman was using his paddle openly and fast. The sound came from behind us, a little to the north, and, judging from its growing distinctness, it was following hard in our track. There was nothing for it but a race. I gave orders.

The men worked well, and we sped through foaming water for perhaps a quarter hour. Then land rose in front of us. It shot up, all in an instant, out of the murk, and we had quick work to keep from grounding our canoes. I could see no shore line to north or south. We had found either the end of a promontory or a small island. We landed on a shelving beach, and lifted the canoes out of danger.

"Lie down," I commanded; and we dropped on the sand, and strained our ears for sound of pursuit.

For a time we heard nothing. Our burst of speed had carried us some distance, and I had begun to think that we had shaken off our pursuer, when again came the beat, beat, beat of the distant oar. We lay close as alligators on a bank, and waited. The strokes came nearer, and at last we saw a sliding shape. As well as we could make out, there was but one canoe, and it was passing us a little to the northward. It would miss the jut of land where we were hiding, and land on the main shore of the peninsula. We could hear but one paddle, so judged that there was but one person in the canoe. Still we did not know.

It was growing near moonrise, and there was nothing to be done. I told the men to lie near together, and sleep till I called them. Then I cut boughs and laid a couple of blankets on them for the woman's couch. She had sat quiet all these hours, and now, as I bade her good-night, she asked her first question.

"Are you willing to tell me why you fear pursuit, monsieur?"

I hesitated. "We grow like animals in the wilderness," I parried, "and so suspect every sound as coming from a foe."

"Then you do not know who it is in the canoe?"

I could have answered "no," but I would not.

"Yes, I think that I know," I replied. "I think that it is Pemaou, a Huron. An Indian whom you have never seen."

She read the hate in my voice. "Do you know what he wants, monsieur?"

And now I could answer truthfully, and with a laugh. "I suspect that he wants, or has been sent to get, something that I have determined to keep, — at least for the present," I told her. "Good-night, madame."

I told my inner self that I must sleep soundly, and wake just before dawn; and so that was what happened. The horizon was flushing when I rose and looked around. My company was asleep. The woman lay on her bright blankets, and I looked at her a moment to make sure that all was well. She was smiling as if her dreams were pleasant, and her face wore such a look of peace, that I turned to the east, ready to begin the day, and to thank God that I had not done everything entirely wrong. I took the lighter of the canoes, carried it to the water, and dipping a cautious paddle, crept off along the shore.

If I wake in the woods every dawn for a year, I can never grow stale to the miracle of it. I was on no pleasant errand, yet I could not help tingling at the cleanness of the air and at the smell of the mint that our canoes had crushed. I hugged the shore like a shadow, and rounded a

little bend. It was as I had thought. We had landed on the western side of a small island, and before me, not a quarter hour's paddling away, stretched the shore line of the peninsula.

Here was my risk. I paddled softly across the open stretch, but that availed me little, for I was an unprotected target. I slanted my course northward, and strained my gaze along the shore. Yet I hardly expected to find anything. It came like a surprise when I saw in advance of me a light canoe drawn up on the sand.

I landed, drew my own canoe to shelter, and reconnoitred. I had both knife and musket ready, and I pulled myself over logs as silent as a snake. Yet, cautious as I was, little furtive rustlings preceded me. The wood folks had seen me and were spreading the warning. Unless Pemaou were asleep I had little chance of surprising him. Yet I crept on till I saw through the leaves the outlines of a brown figure on the ground.

I stopped. I had been trying for a good many hours to balance the right and wrong of this matter in my mind, and my reason had insisted to my inclination that, if I had opportunity, I must kill Pemaou without warning. We respect no code in dealing with a rattlesnake, and I must use this Huron like the vermin that he was. So I had taught myself.

But now I could not do it. The blanket-wrapped shape was as unconscious as a child in its cradle, and though the wilderness may breed hardness of purpose it need not teach butchery. I crept out determined to scuttle the Indian's canoe and go away. If the man waked, my knife was ready to try conclusions with him in a fair field.

I suppose that I really desired him to wake, and that made me careless, for just as I bent to the canoe, I let my foot blunder on a twig, and it cracked like shattering glass. I grasped my knife and whirled. The figure on the ground jerked, threw off its shrouding blanket, and stretched up. It was not Pemaou. It was the Ottawa girl Singing Arrow.

I did not drop my knife. My thought was of decoy and ambush, which was no credit to me, for this girl had been faithful before. But we train ourselves not to trust an Indian except of necessity.

"Are you alone?" I demanded.

She nodded, pressing her lips together and dimpling. She feared me as little as a kitten might.

"I came to the Pottawatamie camp just after you left," she volunteered.

And then I laughed, laughed as I had not done in days. So this was the quarry that I had been

stalking! I had been under a long tension, and it was suddenly comfortable to be ridiculous. I sat down and laughed again.

"Are you following Pierre?" I asked, sobering, and trying to be stern.

But she put her head sidewise and considered me. She looked like a squirrel about to crack a nut.

"A hare may track a stag," she announced judicially. "I have followed you. My back is bent like a worm with the aching of it, but I came faster than a man. I have this for you," and fumbling in her blouse she brought out a bulky packet addressed with my name.

I took it with the marvel that a child takes a sleight-of-hand toy and stared at the seal.

"From Cadillac! From the commandant!" I ejaculated.

She nodded. It was her moment of triumph, but she passed it without outward show.

"Read it. I am sleepy," she said, and yawning in my face she tumbled herself back into the blanket and closed her eyes.

The packet was well wrapped and secured, and I dug my way to the heart of it and found the written pages. The letter began abruptly.

"Monsieur," it said, "I send you strange tidings by a stranger messenger. It is new to me to trust petticoats in matters of secrecy, but

it is rumored that you set me the example, and that you carried off the Englishman dressed in this Singing Arrow's clothes. The Indian herself will tell me nothing. That determined me to trust her.

"Briefly, you are followed. That fire-eating English lad that you have with you — I warrant that he has proved a porcupine to travel with — must be of some importance. At all events, an Englishman, who gives his name as Starling, has made his way here in pursuit. He tells a fair tale. He says that the lad, who is dear as a brother to him, is a cousin, who was captured in an Indian raid on the frontier. As soon as he, Starling, learned of the capture, he started after them, and he has spent months searching the wilderness, as you would sift the sand of the sea. He found the trail at last, and followed it here. He begs that I send him on to you with a convoy.

"Now this, as you see, sounds very fair, and part of it I know to be true. The man is certainly in earnest — about something, — and has spent great time and endeavor in this search. He has even been to Quebec, and worked on Frontenac's sympathies, for he bears from the governor a letter of safe conduct to me, and another, from the Jesuits, to Father Carheil. He comes — apparently — on no political mis-

sion; he is alone, and his tale is entirely plausible. There is but one course open to me. I must let him go on.

"But I do it with misgivings. The story is fair, but I can tell a fair story myself upon occasion, and there is no great originality in this one. I remember that you said after your first interview with your Englishman, that you were afraid he was a spy. There is always that danger, — a danger that Frontenac underestimates because he has not grasped the possibilities that we have here. If both these men should prove to be spies, and in collusion — Well, they are brave men, and crafty; it will be the greater pleasure to outwit them. I cannot overlook the fact that the first Englishman was brought here by the Baron's band of Hurons, and that this man selects his messengers from the same dirty clan. I have reason to think he was in communication with them before he came, — which is no credit to a white man. Dubisson, my lieutenant, tells me that a Huron told his Indian servant that pictures of the prisoner drawn on bark had been scattered among the Indians for a fortnight past. The story was roundabout, and I could not run it down. But it makes me watchful.

"So this is where we stand. I must give this man Starling a letter to you. The letter will

be official, and will direct you to deliver your prisoner into Starling's hands. If he finds you, you have no choice but to obey; so, if you think from your further knowledge of your prisoner that it is unwise for these two men to meet, it is your cue not to be found. I leave it with you.

"There is, of course, great doubt whether this will find you. You asked me about Onanguissé, so I infer that you will stop at the islands at the mouth of La Baye, and I shall send the Indian girl directly there. I shall suggest to Starling that he hug the coast line, and search each bay, and if he listens to me, the girl should reach you well in advance. But it is all guesswork. Starling may have spies among the Indians, and know exactly where you are. I wish he were out of the way. Granted that his errand is fair, he will still see too much. For all men, in whatever state they are born, lack neither vanity nor ambition, and this man is accustomed to command. It is a crack in the dike, and I do not like it.

"But enough. I hear that you trussed Father Blackgown like a pigeon for the spit the night that you went away. I would have given my best tobacco box to have seen it. There was some excitement here over the loss of the prisoner, but no talk of pursuit. Indeed, the Hurons seemed relieved to have him spirited out of the way. Which

is odd, for they took great pains to obtain him. But I am wonted to the unexpected; it is the usual that finds me unprepared. Even Father Blackgown surprises me. He has not complained to me of you, though heretofore I have found him as ready to shout his wrongs as a crow in a cornfield. But again, enough.

"And I have the honor to be, with great respect, monsieur,

"Your very obedient servant,

"ANTOINE DE LA MOTHE-CADILLAC."

I read the letter through twice. Then I turned to Singing Arrow. I was glad she was a savage. If she had been white, man or woman, I should have been obliged to go through a long explanation, and I was not in the mood for it. Now savages are content to begin things in the middle, and omit questions. It may be indolence with them, and it may be philosophy. I have never decided to my satisfaction. But the fact serves.

"Do you think that you were followed?" I asked.

The girl sat up and shook her head. "Only by the stars and the clouds," she answered.

I felt relieved. "And how did you happen to come this way?" I went on. "What did they tell you at the Pottawatamie Islands?"

She stopped to laugh. "That you went the other way," she replied, and she swept her arm to the southwest.

I shrugged my shoulders. "And you thought I lied to them?"

She nodded her answer. "The bird who hides her nest cries and makes a great noise and runs away from it," she explained. "You told all the Pottawatamies who would listen that you were going southwest. So I went southeast."

I could afford to let her laugh at me. "We stopped at that island over there," I said, without comment. "Now we will follow this shore line for a distance south. You must go with us. Singing Arrow, did they tell you at the islands that the English prisoner was a woman, and that she is now my wife?"

The girl did not answer nor look in my direction. She pulled her blanket over her head, and sat as stiffly as a badger above his hole. I could not determine whether the news of the marriage was a surprise or not. It did not matter. I lit my pipe and let her work it out.

"Are you coming?" I asked at last. "I must go back to the island now."

She rose and pulled her blanket around her. She was typically Indian at the moment, unreadable and cold. But she nodded in acquiescence and went to her canoe.

I found my own canoe and we paddled side by side. The sun was over the horizon now and fish were jumping. I saw a great bass that must have weighed five pounds spring his whole length out of the water for a fly. A sportsman in France would have traveled leagues to have seen such a fish, and here it lay ready for my hand. Perhaps after all there was no need to search for reasons for the exultation that was possessing me.

A few moments brought us to the island, and we rounded the point and came into the cove. The little camp was awake and startled by my absence. Pierre was searching the horizon from under a red, hairy hand, and Labarthe was looking to the priming of his arquebus. Only the woman sat steadfast. All this I saw at a glance.

I rushed the canoes to the shore, and helped the Indian girl to alight as I would have helped any woman. I gave one look at the men, and said, "Be still," and then I led Singing Arrow to the woman.

"Madame," I said, "here is the Indian girl who befriended you when you were a prisoner. It was she who passed us last night. She comes to me with documents from Cadillac, and I have great reason to be grateful to her. I commend her to you, madame."

I doubt that the woman heard much of my speech, though I made it earnestly. She was looking at the Indian girl, and the Indian girl at her. I should have liked cordiality between them, but I did not expect it. The woman would do her best, but she would not know how. I had come to think her gracious by nature, and she would treat this girl with courtesy, but she was a great lady while Singing Arrow was a squaw, and she would remember it. Yet Singing Arrow, even though she might admit her inferiority to a white man, would think herself the equal of any woman of whatever rank or race. I could not see how the gulf could be bridged.

But bridged it was, and that oddly. The woman stood for a moment half smiling, and then suddenly tears gathered in her eyes. She put out her hand to Singing Arrow, and the Indian took it, and they walked together back into the trees. They could not understand each other, and I wondered what they would do. But later I heard them laughing.

Well, the woman was destined to surprise me, and she had done it again. I had thought her too finely woven and strong of fibre to be easily emotional. It was some hours before it came to me that she had not been with another woman since the night the savages had found her in the

Connecticut farmhouse. All the world had been a foe to be feared and parried except myself, and I had been a despot. Perhaps she did not know herself. Perhaps she would welcome Benjamin Starling after all. No matter what her horror of him, she could at least be natural with him, if only to show her scorn.

ALICE
PRESCOTT
SMITH

CHAPTER XVI

THE STORM

We embarked in good season that morning and followed the line of the peninsula in its slant to the southwest. It was a pleasant shore, limestone-scarped and tree-bannered, and we paddled so near to it that the squirrels scolded at us, and a daisy-spotted fawn crashed through the young cedars and stared at us with shy eyes. The birds were singing and calling like maids in a hayfield, and the woman sat with her back straight and her eyes laughing, and imitated each new note as the breeze brought it to her. She did it fairly well, but Singing Arrow could have done it better. In my heart I commended the Indian for sitting silent, for I knew that the vanity of her sex and the inherent boastfulness of her savage blood must both be whispering to her that this was the place to show her superiority. But she resisted.

I had taken her in the canoe with the woman and myself, and putting Pierre in her canoe had bidden him follow. I was well satisfied to keep them apart for a time. Yet no sister of the Ursulines could have been more exemplary

with her glances than this Indian was just then. She sat like a figure of destiny and watched the woman. Whether she admired or not I should not know till I saw whether she intended to imitate.

Cadillac's letter lay heavy in my pocket that day and disinclined me to speech. Should I show it to the woman and ask her what she would like to do? And having asked her, should I let her preference warp my final decision? I was not sure. The manner of my life had confirmed me in my natural inclination to decide things for myself and take no counsel. And now all my desires called out to me to destroy this letter and say nothing. Why should I wish to meet Lord Starling? And by keeping out of the way I should be playing into Cadillac's hands and therefore furthering my own ends. Yet the woman! After all, Starling was her cousin. Had she not the right to choose for herself whether she should see him? My training and instinct said no to this last question. Women were made to be cared for, at whatever cost, but not to be taken into confidence as to ways and means. Still I had entered into a bond with this woman. I breathed hard. I had always been restive under any bond, though by nature plodding enough when it was removed. I was aware that I was but sullen company while I rolled this matter in my mind.

The day was warm, and by afternoon soaring pinions of cloud pushed up from the western horizon. I watched their white edges curl and blacken, and when they began to be laced with red lightning I said to the woman that we should have to land.

"Though I hoped to make the Sturgeon Cove," I added idly.

The breeze was rising, drawing sharp criss-cross furrows on the water, and I noticed how it ruffled the woman's hair; her hair was like her eyes, a warm red-brown.

"What is Sturgeon Cove?" she asked. "Is it a bay, — a larger one than we have passed?"

I took a rough map from my wallet and handed it to her. "Much larger, you see," I said. "It almost bisects the peninsula. Only the Sturgeon portage, about a mile long, separates it from the lake of the Illinois. We must be near it now."

She gave but a look at the map, then glanced at the cloud-streaked west and at the shore.

"Try to make it. Try to reach Sturgeon Cove," she urged.

I was thinking of something else, so I answered her only by a shake of the head. Perhaps that angered her. At all events she smote her palms together with a short, soft little clap, such as I use when I call my dog.

"I do not wish to land here," she said, throwing back her head at me quite as she had done when I thought her a boy. "I wish to go on. Why not?"

I motioned Pierre to the shore. "Because you would get wet," I answered stoically.

She flushed as redly as if I had hurt her. "And if I did?" she cried. "Better discomfort than this constant humiliation. Monsieur, I refuse to be made a burden of in this fashion. It is not fair. You made your plans to reach a certain point, and you would go on, rain or otherwise, if it were not for me. For me, for me, for me! I am sick of the sound of the words in my own brain. I am sick of the excuse. Each added sacrifice you make for me weighs me like lead. It binds me. I cannot endure the obligation. Believe me, monsieur."

I had no choice but to believe her. Yet she stopped with a gasp of the breath, as if she had said too much, or perhaps too little, — as if she were dissatisfied. Well, I had but scant desire to reply. I should have liked to walk away, and rebelled in my heart at our forced nearness in the canoe. My feeling was not new. When I had thought her a man she had antagonized me in spite of my interest; as a maid she had troubled me, and now as my wife I found that she had already power to wound. Still,

with all my inner heat, I could look as it were in a mirror and understand her unhappiness and vexation. She was trying to act towards me with a man's fairness and detachment, but each move that I made showed that I considered her solely as a woman and therefore an encumbrance. Let her act with whatever bravery and wisdom she might, her sex still enmeshed us like a silken trap. We could not escape it. And it was a fetter. Mask it as courteously as I would, the fact remained that it was undoubtedly a fetter. I felt a certain compassion for her and her forced dependence, and said to myself that I would hide my own soreness. But her words had bitten, and I am not a patient man.

I turned my canoe inland, and looked to it that the others did the same. Then I leaned toward her.

"No, we will land here," I said. "Madame, I am frequently forced to look behind your words, which are sharp, and search for your meaning, which is admirable. You resent being an encumbrance. May I suggest that you will be less one if you follow my plans without opposition? I mean no discourtesy, madame, when I say that no successful expedition can have two heads in control."

With all her great self-discipline in some di-

rections, she had none in others, and I braced myself for her retort. But none came. Instead she looked at me almost wistfully.

"I lose my temper when I wish I did not," she said. "But I should like to help you, monsieur."

I laid down my paddle. "Help is a curious quantity," I replied. "Especially here in the wilderness where what we say counts for so little and what we are for so much. I think, — it comes to me now, — madame, you have given me strength more than once when you did not suspect it. So you need not try to help me consciously. But now I need your counsel. Will you read this?" and I took Cadillac's letter from my pocket and handed it to her.

She examined the seal with amazement as I had done, then looked at Singing Arrow. "The Indian brought this? It must be very important. Ought I — Is it right for me to see it, monsieur?"

I laughed. I looked off at the piling thundercaps and the ruffling water, and the exhilaration of the coming storm whipped through me. There was a pleasant tang to life.

"Read it, yes," I insisted. "You are Madame de Montlivet. No one can have a better right. Read it after we land."

It took some moments to make a landing, for the waves were already high and the shore

rough. In spite of ourselves we tore the canoes on hidden rocks. We unloaded the cargo and had things snug and tidy by the time the first great drops plumped down upon us. We worked like ants, and I did not look at the woman. I knew that she was reading the letter, and I had no wish to spy.

But when I went to her there was no letter in sight. I did not stop to talk, but I wrapped her in the cloak that Onanguissé had given her, and wound her still further with blankets. "You will be cool enough in a few minutes," I assured her, and I made a nest for her in a thicket of young pines. She obeyed me dumbly, but with a certain gentleness, a sort of submission. As she gazed up at me with her brown face and inscrutable eyes, my hands were not quite steady. Heretofore I had felt her power; now I felt only her inexperience, her dependence. Child, woman, sphinx! What should I do with her? I turned away. The rain was upon us in earnest.

I looked for my crew. The men were curled under trees, but Singing Arrow had used more craft. She had hidden herself under her light canoe, — which she had first secured with pegs that it might not blow away, — and she lay as compact and comfortable as a tree-housed grub. I lifted the corner of the canoe and peered

at her, whereat she giggled happily, serene in the thought that I was wet while she was dry. She was as restful to the brain as a frolicking puppy, and I shook my head at her to hear her giggle again. I was about to wonder whether she had ever known awe of anything, but just then the thunder, which had been merely growling, barked out like a howitzer above us, and she covered her head and screamed like any of her sex.

The thunder sent me back to the woman. I crept, wet as I was, into her pine-needled hollow, and started to ask if she were afraid. But the question died at sight of her. She was propped on her elbows, and had parted the low boughs in front of her that she might look out at the storm. She turned at sound of me, and the blood was in her cheeks as I felt it in mine.

"Come," she cried with her motion.

I went and lay close beside her, peering, as she did, through the trees. The world was all wind and red light and churning water. I could feel her quick breathing.

"I can hear the spirit of the wilderness crying," she said to me. The lightning played over her face and eyes, and they shone like flame.

I laid a hand on her wet blankets. "Has the rain soaked through?"

But she did not listen. The exultation in her

look I have seen sometimes in the face of a young priest; I have also seen it in a savage dancer. It is all one. It is the leaping response of the soul to the call of a great freedom. Storm was summoning storm. I found the woman's hand, and lay with it in mine.

She remembered me again after a time. "Does it call to you?" she cried.

I could feel the blood racing in her palm. "As it does to you," I answered, and I lay still, and let the storm riot in me, and around me, with her hand held close.

We could not speak for some time. The thunder was constant, and the play of the lightning was like the dazzle of a fencer's sword. Mingled with the thunder came the slap of frothing water and the whine of bending trees. The wind was ice to the cheeks.

At the first lull the woman turned to me. "If you had followed my wishes we should have been drowned."

I nodded. I had no wish to speak. The storm in me was not lessening. I kept the woman's hand and was swept on by the tempest.

And the woman, too, lay silent. I saw her look at me once, and look away. And then, because I could think more coherently, it came to me that she had changed. The change had come since she had read Cadillac's letter. She

had said nothing, but she was different. What did it mean? Was she natural at last because she thought succor was near? I was not ready to know. The moments that I had now were mine. Ten minutes later they might, if she decreed, belong to Benjamin Starling.

The storm passed as swiftly as the shifting of a tableau. The rain stopped, not lingeringly, but as if a key had been turned, and cracks came in the clouds like clefts in black ice and showed the blue beyond. In five minutes the sun was shining. We all crept out from under trees and canoes, and shook ourselves like drenched fowls.

It was magic the way the world changed. The wind died, and the sun shone low and yellow, and a robin began to sing. The water was still white and fretting, and the sand was strewn with torn leaves, but otherwise there was peace. I told Pierre to take one of the men and find dry fuel for a fire, and Labarthe to take the other and attend to gumming the canoes. Then I went to the woman, who had slipped dry and red-cheeked from her wrappings, and was walking in the sun.

"Well, Madame Montlivet," I said, with a bow, "what shall we do about Monsieur Cadillac's letter?"

There was laughter in my voice, and it con-

fused her. "What shall we do?" she echoed doubtfully. "Did you mean to say 'we'?"

I bowed again. "'We' assuredly. It must be a joint decision. Come, it is for you to declare your mind. Do we seek Lord Starling, do we hide from him, or do we stand still and let Fate throw the dice for us? What do you wish, madame?"

She looked at me with a little puzzled withdrawal. "Why do you laugh?" she asked.

I was loath to vex her. But, indeed, I could not check the tide of joyous excitement that was surging through me. "I do not know quite why I laugh," I answered truly. "Perhaps it is because the sun is shining, and because life looks so fair and rich and full of possibilities. But, madame, we have been tragic too long; it irks us both. Tell me, now. It rests with you. Shall we paddle northwest and search for your cousin, Lord Starling?"

She thought a moment. "You wish it?"

"No, madame."

She turned away. "Then why ask me? You said there could not be two heads in this command."

I sobered. "Now that was a cat's scratch," I rebuked. "You have never done that before."

The gentleness of her look made me ashamed. "You are suspicious of me," she said a little

sadly. "That was not a scratch, monsieur. I said what I mean; I prefer to leave the decision in your hands."

"But your wish?"

"It is confused, monsieur."

"But your sense of justice in the matter?"

She was silent a moment, and walked up and down. "I have been trying to see the right ever since I read the letter," she said quietly. "This is the best answer I can make. I think that we had better avoid meeting Lord Starling, monsieur."

I stepped to her side and matched my pace to hers. The robin had been joined by his mate, and they were singing. "Why, madame?" I asked her, and when she was still silent I persisted. "Why, madame?"

She lifted grave eyes to me. "I think it will be wise to keep Lord Starling in the wilderness as long as possible," she answered. "If he does not find me it may be that he will keep on searching. He may not, — but again he may. On the other hand, if he finds me he will assuredly go home."

"And if he does go home? I assure you the wilderness is no sweeter in my eyes while he is here."

She handed me Cadillac's letter. "I think that you know what I mean," she said. "Your

commandant is á wise man. Monsieur, I do not understand Lord Starling's purpose in this journey, but I am afraid that Monsieur de la Mothe-Cadillac is right. My cousin may be treating secretly with the Indians. He is a capable man, and not easy to read. I do not know why he should be here."

I looked down at her. "But I know. He is here to find you. Have you forgotten what I said to you yesterday morning? He will not rest till he has found you. Ought we to save him anxiety? I can understand that he has suffered."

But she shook her head, and her eyes as she looked up at me showed the deep sadness that always seemed, while it lasted, to be too rooted ever to be erased.

"You are an idealist, monsieur. You believe in man's constancy as I do not. I cannot believe that I am the moving cause of Lord Starling's journey. He would undoubtedly like to find me, for I am of his house and of use to him, but he has other purposes. Of that I am sure."

I grew cruel because I was glad; there is nothing so ruthless as happiness. "And you would thwart his purposes, madame?" I cried.

She looked at me coldly. "I will not be used as a tool against you," she said.

"And that is all?"

"It is enough. I have said this to you many

times. Why do you make me say it again? I have undertaken to do something, and I will carry it through. I will not lend myself to any plot against your interests. I will not. So long as we are together, I will play the game fair."

"And when we are no longer together?"

She pushed out her hands. "I do not know. I am glad that you asked me that. Monsieur, if any chance should free us from each other, if we should reach Montreal in safety, why, then, I do not know. I come of an ambitious race. It may be that I shall use the information that I have. I love my country as you do yours, and when a woman has had some beliefs taken from her there is little remaining her but ambition. So let me know as little as possible of your plans, for I may use my knowledge. I give you warning, monsieur."

The happiness in me would not die, and so, perhaps, I smiled. She looked at me keenly.

"You think that I am vaunting idly," she said. "Perhaps I am. I do not know what I shall do. But, monsieur, for your own sake do not underestimate my capacity for doing you harm. I mean that as a gauge."

She stood against the sunset, and her delicate height and proud head showed like a statue's. I stooped and lifted an imaginary glove from the sand.

"I take your gauge," I said. "But I find it a small and delicate gauntlet for so warlike a purpose. May I wear it next my heart, madame?"

She looked at me proudly. "I am serious," she said.

"And I take you seriously," I rejoined. I stepped to her and let my hand touch hers. "You wrong me. I find that I take you very seriously indeed. Believe me. But I have always lived in the present. Come, we have been grave long enough. Let us be children and take the passing moment. Madame, Montreal is very far away."

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER THE STORM

We slept at that place that night, and the stars came out clear, and the water on the sand sang like a harp played by the wind. I slept, but I dreamed. I thought that Lord Starling came to me, and that the woman went away. And then the dream shifted, and I stood in a strange, barren mist-world, and I was alone. I saw the awful loneliness of creation, and immensity stretched around me. I traveled through infinite spaces of void and blackness, and found no sound of voice or life, yet all the time, welling high within me, was a tide, the fullness of which I had never known in my waking hours. All the strength that I had hoarded, all the desire for love that I had pushed aside, all of the fierce commotions of unrest that mark us from the brute, stirred in me till I felt as if I were suffocating, and cried out for a helping hand. But I was alone, and gray wastes surrounded me, and my surge of feeling beat itself out against desolation. I woke with sweat on my forehead.

I woke to a black night. The stars looked

cold, and the men beside me lay as if dead. I looked up and watched the roll of the planets. The mystery of infinity which lies naked at midnight in the wilderness drives some men mad. Heretofore I had been untouched by it except with delight. Now I crept cautiously to my feet and went softly to the woman.

I know that I stepped without sound, but as I stood for a moment looking down at the couch of boughs where she lay I heard a guarded whisper.

"Monsieur, monsieur."

I bent over her. Her eyes were not only open, but wakeful, and her small face looked white against the dark blanket.

"What is it, monsieur?" she whispered.

I knelt that I might answer softly. "I woke, and thought you were in danger. I came to look at you and be sure that all was well. You do not sleep, madame?"

She shook her head. "I slept, but I dreamed. And you, monsieur?"

"I, too, have dreamed."

I thought that she smiled at me, though her face, when I leaned to see it clearly, blurred into the dark.

"Will you sleep the rest of the night within sound of my voice?" she asked, with a little tremble in her whisper. "The wilderness to-

night is like that storm. Its greatness terrifies me. Do you think that all is well, monsieur?"

I was glad that she could not see my face. "Yes, I think that all is very well," I answered. "Blessedly well. Sleep, now, madame. I shall stay here, and your whisper would wake me. Is there terror in the wilderness now?"

Again she shook her head. "No," she whispered.

I lay beside her couch and cushioned my head in my arm. I had answered her truly. All was very well with me, for at last I saw clearly; I knew myself. The dream, the night, and something that I could not name, had stripped me naked to my own understanding. I felt as if, man that I had thought myself, I had played with toys until this moment, and that now, for the first time, I was conscious of my full power for joy or suffering. I looked up through the star spaces and was grateful for knowledge, for knowledge even if it brought pain.

I had not lain this way long when I heard her stir.

"Monsieur," came her whisper.

I lifted myself to my knees. "Yes, madame."

"You were not asleep?"

"No, madame."

"Monsieur, I was loath to disturb you, but I cannot sleep. Tell me. Suppose that Lord Starling should find us. Will he have power to take me?"

"Away from your husband? How could he, madame?"

She stirred, and turned her face from me, even though I could not see it in the dark.

"But he has a warrant," she whispered. "The letter said that you must deliver me to my cousin if we were found. What will be done with you, monsieur, if you refuse to obey?"

Then I bent close and let her hear me laugh softly.

"I know of no warrant that applies to you," I murmured. "Cadillac's letter mentioned an Englishman. I know of none such. I travel with a woman, my wife, and commandants have naught to do with us. Was that what was troubling you, madame?"

She bowed, and her breath came unevenly. Her right hand lay outside the blanket, and I bent and touched it with my lips.

"How you hate Lord Starling! How you hate him!" I whispered. "I wonder, can you love as singly? Can you love with as little care for self and comfort and for all the fat conveniences of life? Madame, you are a willful child

to lie here and tilt at shadows when you should be garnering strength by sleep. I promised you my sword and my name, and I agreed that they should both be yours till of your own wish you should send me away. Had you forgotten that I promised? I had not."

I had slipped to my knees again and rested with my forehead on her hand. I could feel her other hand stray toward me.

"No," she whispered. "No, I had not forgotten, but the dark and a sudden loneliness made me a coward. Thank you. It is over now and I will sleep. Monsieur, my partner, I will say good-night, and this time I will not call you."

But I rested a moment longer on my knees with my head against her palm. Then I rose.

"Partners, perhaps," I said softly. "Yet more than that. Madame, are we not like pilgrims groping our way together on a dark road? We cannot see far ahead, but there is a light in the distance. I think that we shall reach it. Good-night. We shall both sleep now, madame."

But she slept and I did not. It was nearly day when I closed my eyes again, yet I did not find the moments long.

The next morning was quiet and the sky

clear. I had read my maps rightly, and once embarked, an hour of paddling brought us to Sturgeon Cove. It opened before us suddenly, a wedge of flecked turquoise laid across the shaded greens of the peninsula. As we entered it a flock of white gulls rose from the rocky shore and flew before us. The air, rain washed, was so limpid that it seemed a marvel that it could sustain the heavy-pinioned birds, but they moved in sure curves and seemed to bear us with them. I pointed the woman's glance toward them.

"An omen. We shall follow them and rest here. It is our home."

We nosed our way, with leisurely paddles, close to the northern shore. The land sloped gently from the beach, and the quivering water, a faded green from the tree shadows, crawled over gravel that was patterned with the white of quartz and with the pomegranate of carnelian. It was a jeweled pavement, and it led to forest aisles where cathedral lights splashed through the trees. But I would not stop. The gulls were still leading.

The bay narrowed, and the shores pressed close to us, with compact ranks of cedars held spearwise. Yet we pushed on, and the water path spread out once more, a final widening. We saw before us the rounded end of the bay,

and the neck of land that formed the Sturgeon portage. The woman looked at me.

"What now, monsieur?"

But I smiled at her with my conceit untroubled. I had seen reeds close to the northern shore. "Halt!" I cried to the canoes.

We lay quiet a moment, and the birds glancing back at us found us suddenly harmless. The reeds under them were swarming with young fish. The gulls looked down and squawked in a hungry chorus. In a moment they lighted, balancing their great wings like reefing sails.

I laughed as I looked at the woman. It was a small triumph, but intoxication breeds easy laughter. I had been drinking deep that morning of a sparkling happiness more disturbing than any wine.

We sent the canoes shoreward into the curve where the reeds lay. The stiff green withes rattled against our canoes like hail, and gave warning of our approach for a half mile distant. I nodded my inner approval.

"The gulls are wise," I said to the woman. "We could not plan a better water defense to our camp."

The grass came down to the water, and we pulled the canoes over short turf and into beds of white blossoms. A cloud of butterflies rose

to greet us; they too were satin-white, the color that a bride should wear, and they fluttered over us without fear. The smell of the grasses rose like incense. With all the light and perfume there was a sense of quiet, of deep content and peace. Even the woods that fringed the meadow seemed kindly. They did not have the sombre awe of the heavy timber, but looked sun-drenched and gay.

"We shall stay here," I said. "Unload the canoes."

Five men with good sinews, some understanding, and well-sharpened axe blades, can make a great change in the forest in one day. When the sunset found us I had a fortified house built for my wife. It was framed of fragrant pine, and occupied the extremity of a spit of land that lay next the meadow. Its door opened on the water, and I made the opening wide so that the stars might look in at night. All about the sides and rear of the house were laid boughs, one upon another, and on the top of this barricade was stretched a long cord threaded with hawk's bells. The lodges for myself and the men we placed in the rear, and behind them we laid still another wall of brush to separate us from the forest. I was satisfied with the defenses. With the reeds in front and the brush behind, any intruder would sound his own alarm.

The woman took Singing Arrow and went to her house early that night, but I sat late over my charts and journal. I had much to study and more to plan.

Yet I was abroad the next morning while the stars were still reflected in the bay. Labarthe was with me, and we took Singing Arrow's light canoe and packed it with supplies and merchandise. Then we breakfasted on meal and jerked meat and were ready to start.

But the rest of the men were not yet astir, and the woman's house was silent. I walked to it and stood irresolute. I disliked to wake her. Yet I could not leave her without some message. But while I pondered I heard her step behind me. She came up from the water, and she looked all vigor and morning gladness.

"Why the canoe so early?" she called. "Do we have fish for breakfast?"

I took her hand. "Come with me to the water." I led her to the canoe and pointed out the bales of supplies. "You see we are ready for work. We shall be back in a few days."

She dropped my hand. "Then why did you build that house?"

"Why not, madame?"

"But you say that we are to go this morning."

"I must go, madame."

"And you intend to leave me here?"

"Why, yes, madame."

"But you said 'we.'"

I looked some amazement. "I take Labarthe with me. I leave three men with you on guard. There is nothing to fear."

And then she threw back her head. "I do not think that I am afraid," she said more quietly. "But — I was not prepared for this. It had not occurred to me that you would go away."

I stopped a moment. "I do not go for pleasure. Indeed, I cannot imagine a fairer spot in which to linger and forget the world. But did you think that I would sit in idleness, madame?"

She looked down. "I do not know that I thought at all about it. It has gone on like a play, a dream. Perhaps I thought it would continue. Your plan is to travel from tribe to tribe, and come back here at intervals?"

"That is my plan. I shall buy furs and cache them here. I shall try not to be away more than a week at a time. I regret that I surprised you. I did not think but that you understood."

She stood biting her lips and smiling to herself in half-satiric, half-whimsical fashion. "It says little for my intelligence that I was unpre-

pared. You are a man, not a courtier. I should have known that you would not waste an hour. I wish that I might go with you."

"Madame, I wish it, too."

She looked up more briskly. "But that would be impossible. Have you instructions for me, monsieur?"

"Madame, if you are afraid, come with me."

"I am not afraid if you say that it is safe, monsieur."

"Thank you, madame. I think that it is entirely safe. Pierre is a good deal of a fool and more of a knave, but in some few respects there is no one like him; he is a rock. You are my wife and in his charge. He will guard you absolutely."

"Are we in danger of attack?"

"I can imagine no possible reason for attack, else I should not leave you. The Indians are friendly. One thing troubles me. Your cousin — Should" —

She looked up. "Should Lord Starling find me?" she completed. "Well, he would tarry here until you came. He would at least show that courtesy. I can promise as much as that for the family name, monsieur."

I smiled at her. "I shall await the meeting," I said with unction. I motioned Labarthe to the paddle, and I kissed the woman's hand.

"I salute your courage. I shall see you within the week, madame."

She looked straight at me. "And until then, good fortune."

But I paused. "Wish me opportunity. That is all that I ask from you or of you, — opportunity. Good-by for a week, madame."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH I USE OPPORTUNITY

I SQUATTED beside many camp fires in the next week. I sat in the flattened cones of the Chippewas' tepees and smoked innumerable pipes of rank tobacco with the old men. I traded some, but talked more, and at the end of the week I started home. I waited for a pleasant day and a westerly wind, for the small canoe was perilously laden with skins. There was scarcely room for Labarthe and myself to crowd down on our knees and use our paddles.

We slipped into Sturgeon Cove late in the afternoon, and swept with the wind up the stretches of the bay to the camping ground. Summer was at flood tide, and the air was pungent and the leaves shining. The sunset shone through tattered ends of cloud, so that the west was hung with crimson banners. It was my first homecoming.

Before we reached the camp I saw the woman. She had strayed down the shore to the west, — too far for safety, I thought, — and was standing alone on the sand, looking toward the sunset. Her head was back, and her arms flung

out to the woods and the shining sky. I have sometimes found myself stretching my own arms in just that fashion when I have been alone and have felt something pressing within me that was too large for speech. I motioned Labarthe to ship his paddle that I might look. The western glow was full upon the woman, and her lips were parted. The open sleeves of her skin blouse fell away from her arms, which had grown gently rounded since I saw her first. I could not see her eyes, but she looked somewhere off into the untraveled west, — the west that was the portal of my enterprise. What was her thought? I must not let myself trap it unaware. I gave a long, low call; the call of the loon as he skirts the marshes in the twilight.

She turned instantly and saw us. I bent forward. The drabbled plume of my hat swept the water, and I heard Labarthe curse under his breath, and beg me remember that the canoe was laden. But just then I had no caution in me.

The woman's arms dropped. She had a moment of indecision, and she stood looking at me with the sunset in her face and eyes. Then she suddenly thrust out both hands towards me across the stretch of water. I could see her smooth-skinned brown fingers, and one wore my ring. She bade me welcome. I bent to my pad-

dle, and would have crashed the canoe up to the shore.

But she forestalled me. She was already on her way back to the camp, and if she knew that I had started toward her she did not let me see. So I had, perforce, to follow. She walked with the free, gliding step of a woman whose foot had been trained on polished surfaces. I watched her, and let Labarthe paddle our way through the reeds.

We reached the camp, deafened by Pierre's bellow of greeting. The woman had kept pace with us, and stood waiting for us to disembark. She was breathing quickly and the blood was in her brown cheeks; her great eyes were frankly opened and shining. I pushed by the men and bent to kiss her hand.

"Madame, thank you for my welcome home."

She bowed, and I caught the perfume of a rose on her breast. "Monsieur, we are all rejoiced to see you safe." Her tone took, half-whimsically, the note of court and compliment. The fingers that I still held were berry stained. She showed them to me with a laugh and a light word, and so made excuse to draw them away. Her hair had grown long enough to blow into her eyes, and she smoothed a soft loose wave of it as she questioned me about my voyage.

I was new to the wonder of seeing her there, so

answered her stupidly. For all my day-dreams of the week that I had been away I was not prepared for her. And indeed she had altered. The strain of fear and incessant watchfulness was removed, and with the lessening of that tension had come a pliancy of look and gesture, a richness of tone that found me unprepared. I made but a poor figure. It was as well that work clamored at me, and that I had to turn away and direct the men.

We ate our supper at the time of the last daylight, and the whippoorwills were calling and the water singing in the reeds. It was a silent meal, but I sat beside the woman, and when it was over I drew her with me to the shore. It was very still. Fireflies danced in the grasses, and the stars pricked out mistily through a gauze of cloud. I wrapped the woman in her fur coat, and bade her sit, while I stretched myself at her feet. Then I turned to her.

"Madame, have you questions for me that you did not wish the men to hear?"

She sat very quietly, but I knew that her hand, which was within touch of mine, grew suddenly rigid.

"Monsieur, you heard nothing of Lord Starling?"

I touched her hand lightly. "Nothing, madame. I have no news."

"Then matters stand just as they did a week ago?"

I hesitated. "As concerns Lord Starling, yes. As concerns ourselves — Madame, I carry a lighter heart than I did. All this week I have feared that you were fretting at the loneliness and the rough surroundings. But I find you serene and the surface of life smooth. It is a gallant spirit that you bring to this situation. I thank you, madame."

She did not speak for a moment, so that I wondered if I had vexed her. I looked up straight into her great eyes that were full on me, and there was something disquietingly alight in her glance, a flicker of that lightning that had played between us on the day of the storm.

"Monsieur!" she cried, with a little sobbing laugh. "I beg you never to thank me — for anything. The stream of gratitude must always run from me to you. I have not been serene because of any will of mine. It has been instinctive. I can sometimes carry out a fixed purpose, but I do it stiffly, inflexibly, not as you do, with a laugh and a shrug, monsieur. No, no! My serenity has not been calculated. I have been — I have been almost happy. It is strange, but it is true."

I drew my hand away from her finger tips, for

my own were shaking. "Madame, what makes you happy?"

She looked down at me with frank seriousness, but her eyes still kept their sweet, strange brightness; she pressed her palms together as she always did when much in earnest.

"Monsieur, is it so strange after all? Think of the wonder of what I see about me! The great stars, the dawns, and the strange waters that go no one knows where. I have lived all my life in courts and have not felt trammeled by them, but now — Monsieur, there is a freedom, yes, and a happiness stirring in me that I have not known. I wonder if you understand? '

I watched the starlight draw elfin lines across her face, and my heart suddenly cried through my tongue words that my brain would have forbidden.

"I understand this at least. Madame, you talk of happiness. I am finding happiness at this moment that I never felt at court, — no, nor in the wilderness till now."

She did not draw back nor protest, but she looked at me with wistful gravity.

"Monsieur — Monsieur"—

"I am your servant, madame."

She halted. "This is a masque, a comedy," she stumbled. "This — this life in the greenwood. Does it not seem a fantasy?"

"You seem very real to me, madame."

"Monsieur, I tell you, it is a masque. Will you not help me play it as such?"

"You treat it as a masque in your own heart, madame?"

She turned her face into the shadow. "I eat, I sleep, I laugh with the birds, and I play with Singing Arrow. I do not look ahead." She rose. "Play with me. Play it is a dream, monsieur."

I rose and stepped beside her toward her cabin. "I am a man," I said, with a short laugh of my own. "I cannot spin words nor cheat myself. But I shall not distress you. Do not fear me, madame."

But her step lingered. "You leave us soon?"

"At dawn to-morrow."

"Monsieur! And you go" —

"To the Winnebagoes. I shall return in a week."

She clasped her hands behind her as if her white cloak bound her. "To the Winnebagoes, — to another tribe of Indians! Are you sure that they are friendly? I forget that there are Indians in the forest, since I see none here. Ah, you must sleep now if you are to rise so early. Good-night, and — thank you, monsieur. Good-night." I had hardly bowed to her in turn before her long light step had brought her to her door.

And then I went back to work. The furs had been sorted, labeled, and cached; the canoe had been dried, and its splints examined and new bales of merchandise had been made up for the trip on the morrow. But there remained much writing and figuring to be gone over. It seemed as if I had but closed my eyes when Labarthe touched me on the shoulder and told me it was dawn.

And out in the dawn I found the woman. She had seen to it that the whole camp was astir, and the fire was crackling and the kettle already puffing steam. The morning was austere and gray-veiled, so that the red blaze was like the cheer of home. We ate with laughter, and sleepy birds scolded in the thickets. The woman sparkled with dainty merriment that held my thanks at bay. It was only when she waved her adieus at the beach that she dropped her foils.

"I shall pray for fair winds, monsieur," she called.

I looked back at her across the widening water. "Madame, can you hear me? The wind I pray for will blow me back to you.'

Metaphor aside, it was a favorable day and the breeze was with us. We pushed up a tarpaulin on our paddles for a square sail, and covered the distance to the west shore of La Baye in a few hours. Before night we were lifting

the rush mats that hung before the reed-thatched lodges of the Winnebagoes.

And here for seven days I plied my trade. A man has many coats and all may fit him. The one that I wore in those days showed the bells and ribands of the harlequin, but there was chain armor underneath. I counted my results as satisfactory when I started home.

We did not reach the camp on this second homecoming till after the stars were out. That left me too few hours for a large labor, and I had but hurried greetings from the woman while all the camp looked on. The men were sleek from idleness, and I had need to goad them with word and eye. It was late before I could linger at the woman's cabin and beg a word. She sat with Singing Arrow, watching the soft night, and again her first question was of her cousin.

"You have heard nothing of Lord Starling?"

Was this fear of him or a covert wish to meet him? "Nothing, madame," I replied. "But I have been to the south far out of your cousin's way. I go next to the Malhominis. I think I shall certainly hear tidings of him there."

"You go to-morrow?"

"I must, madame. Madame, I have been anxious about you. Will you promise me not to stray alone from the camp?"

She left the cabin and came and stood beside me in the quiet and starshine. She looked off at the forest.

"Is there danger around us, monsieur?"

I followed her look back into the dark timber. We both hushed our breathing till we heard the moan of the water and the lament of some strange night bird. The woman was so small, and yet I left her in the wilderness without me!

"Keep close to the camp," I said hoarsely. "No, I know of no danger. But keep close to the camp."

Her glance came back to me. "Ah, you do think there is danger! But, monsieur, of yourself — If there is peril for me there must be more for you."

She looked at me fully, with no fear in her eyes, but with quick, intelligent concern. She stood beside me in the dusk, as wife should stand with husband, and feared for my safety and forgot her own. Yet I dared not touch her hand. I lifted my sword and slammed it in its scabbard.

"There is no danger," I said, with stupid brusqueness. "I am over-anxious. I bid you good-night, madame."

I went to the Malhominis with haste pushing me, for I hoped for news of Starling. I pressed forward, yet I recoiled. There would be cross-

threads to untangle when I met my wife's cousin.

It was wonderful voyaging to the Malhominis. Their village was near the mouth of a river, and they were close bound with great rice swamps that gave them their name. Our low canoe burrowed through a tunnel of green as we nosed our way up to their camp. Birds fluttered in the tangle, and fish bubbled to the surface under our paddles. I did not wonder that I found the tribe as well fed as summer beavers. But I learned nothing from them. They were a good-natured people, as running over with talk as idle women, and they assured me that I was the first white man they had seen since the moon of worms. We talked of the Huron situation at Michillimackinac, but they said nothing of having seen a warrior of that tribe, so I made sure that Pemaou had not been with them. I swallowed relief and disappointment. They said that a small company of Sacs was encamped to the north, and that Father Nouvel was with them. So after a few days I went on.

A waft of fetid air on a hot day will bring the smell of that Sac camp to me even now. The Sacs were a migratory, brutish people, who snatched at life red-handed and growling, and as I squatted in their dirty hovels, I lost, like a dropped garment, all sense of the wonder and

freedom of my wilderness life. Suddenly all the forest seemed squalid, and a longing for the soft ease and cleanliness of civilization came on me like a wave. But I hid the feeling, and lingered, though my welcome was but slight. Even my small cask of brandy failed to buy their smiles, and it was only when I talked of war that they listened. They were a useless people on the water, for they could not handle canoes, but land warfare was their meat. So I talked long.

I found Father Nouvel among them, his delicate old face shining white and serene amid their grime. I fell upon him eagerly, but he could tell me nothing. He had left the Pottawatamies the day after the wedding, and had heard no rumors of any Englishman. I did not take him into my confidence. He had outlived the time when the abstract terms "ambition" and "patriotism" had meaning to him. The story of my hopes would have tinkled in his ears like the blarings of a child's trumpet. But in one matter he questioned me.

"Your wife, — should you not have brought her with you, monsieur?"

I felt piqued. "But her comfort, Father Nouvel!"

He looked me over. "I think somehow that she would prefer your company to her own com-

fort," he said, and when I did not answer he looked troubled. When he bade me good-by, he spoke again.

"Your wife came strangely near my heart. You are giving her a hard life. You will be patient with her, monsieur?"

I bowed, for I did not wish to answer. Mine was a real marriage to Father Nouvel. I thought of the look in the priest's eyes as he made us man and wife, and of the voices of the Indian women as they chanted of life and marriage, and I shut my teeth on a sudden feeling of bitterness. A man may be counted rich yet know himself to be a pauper. I never saw Father Nouvel again. If he were living now I would go far to meet him.

It was a long day's travel back to Sturgeon Cove, and night had fallen before we wound our passage around the curves of the bay and saw the clear eye of the evening fire burning steadily on the shore. Our double trip had taken eleven days, and for me the time had lagged. I had carried an unreasoning weight of oppression, and the shout that I gave at sight of the black figures around the blaze was an outburst of relief.

My company flung themselves at the shore, and all talked at once.

"For three days we have watched," Singing Arrow scolded.

The woman stood near, and I went to her. "Have you watched for three days?" I asked, with my lips on her hand.

"Yes," she said, and then I felt ashamed, for her eyes looked worn and troubled.

"Forgive me, madame," I murmured, though I scarcely knew for what, and I felt embarrassed and without words.

"I will stay here to-morrow," I said stupidly, and when she said that she was glad, it did not seem to me that she meant it. I saw her no more that night.

But with the fresh morning I forgot all chill. We lingered over a breakfast of broiled bass, and the woman showed me a canoe that Simon had made for her. Simon was the deft-fingered member of my crew, and he had fashioned a fairy craft. I saw that it would carry two, and I said to the woman that we would take it, and have a day of idleness together. I feared she might demur, but she did not. Indeed, she suddenly laughed out like a child without much reason, and there was that in the sound that satisfied me, until I swore at the men and their blundering to keep down my own joy.

We took materials for lunch and started before the dew was dry. The woman showed me her new skill with the paddle, and I praised her without care for my conscience. We went

slowly and we talked much. Yet we talked only of the birds and the woods and the paddling. Never of ourselves.

At noon we landed in a pocket of an inlet on the south side of the cove toward its mouth. There was a wonderful meadow there with tiger lilies burning like blood and a giant sycamore leaning to the water. I cooked a venison steak on hot stones, and we had maize cakes and wild berries and water from a spring. We sat alone at meat as we had never done.

After lunch the woman sat under the sycamore and I lay at her feet. I looked up at her till her eyes dropped.

"Madame," I whispered, "madame, you were vexed with me last night."

She forced her glance to mine. "Monsieur, I had been terribly anxious for three days. When I saw you" —

A sun ray fell across her face, and I took my hat and held it between her and the light. "You did not finish," I said. "I will help you. When you saw that I was safe you were vexed that I had not come earlier and so saved you anxiety? Is that what you were about to say, madame?"

She turned to smile and shake her head at my seriousness. She fought down her rising color and held her head like a gallant boy.

"I was unreasonable," she said. "Please forget it. Did your trading prosper, monsieur?"

But I would not shift my eyes. "I shall try not to vex you again in that way. I did not think — except of my own anxiety. Let me tell you what I have been doing. I have been trading, yes, but I have also" —

"Careful, monsieur!"

"I wish you to know. Madame, I am succeeding in my intriguing among the tribes. I talk more than I trade. You would smile at my rhetoric and call me a mountebank, but I am succeeding. I tell the tribes that when more than one Englishman reaches here the whole race will follow and will overflow the hunting grounds as a torrent does the lowlands. I tell them the English will bring the Iroquois. I show them that the French are their only protection. They listen, for what I say is not new. It has been talked around their fires for a long time, but the tribes are not powerful enough to act alone, and they have lacked a leader who could unite them. I think that they will follow me if I call them to war, madame!"

She looked at me steadily. "War upon whom, monsieur?"

"War upon the Iroquois. Upon the English if they venture near."

"And you tell me this because" —

"Because I wish sincerity between us."

My hat lay at her feet, and she pressed its sorry plume between her fingers. "Monsieur, if you had heard news of Lord Starling during this last week you would have told me at once."

"I should have told you at once, madame. I am glad you introduced this matter. Does your mind still hold? Or do you now think that we should seek your cousin?"

Again she lowered her eyes, but I did not miss the sudden flash in them. "My cousin chose his path. Why need we interfere? Have you — have you theories as to where he can be?"

I flicked my finger at a wandering robin. "I am as guiltless of theories as that bird. It is passing strange. Your cousin and our ghostly Huron seem to have gone up in vapor."

"Our ghostly Huron, monsieur?"

I planted my elbows on the grass that I might face her. "Listen, madame. It is time you knew the story of Pemaou." And thereupon I recited all that had happened between the Huron and myself from the day when we had played at shuttlecock with spears till the night when he had shadowed us at the Pottawatamie camp, — the night before our wedding. I even told her of the profile in his pouch.

She winced at that. "Why did you not tell me before?"

"It seemed useless to alarm you."

"But you tell me now."

I smiled at her. "I know you better. It seems fitting to tell you everything now, madame."

She looked at me with a frown of worry. "Monsieur, you are in danger from that Huron. He hates you if you humbled him."

I laughed at her. "He would not dare harm a Frenchman, madame."

"Then why does he follow you?"

But there I could only shrug. "He was probably in Lord Starling's pay, and was keeping track of us that he might direct your cousin to us. But we have shaken him off."

She thought this over for some time without speaking, and I was content to lie silent at her feet. Bees droned in the flowers and white drifts of afternoon clouds floated over us. I was happy in the moment, and more than that, I was drugged with my dreams of the future. There were days and days and days before us. This was but the threshold. And then, with my ear to the ground, I heard the sound of an axe. The sound of an axe in an untraveled wilderness!

I crowded closer to the ground. My blood beat in my temples, and I was awake with every muscle. But I learned nothing. The sound of an axe and then silence.

The woman looked at me. "Monsieur, is something wrong? Your face has changed."

I stretched out my hand to her. "You must not grow fanciful. But come. It is time to go home, madame."

I pushed her into the canoe in haste, but when we had once rounded the turn of the bluff we floated home slowly. The light of late afternoon is warm and yellow. It cradled the woman in lapping waves, and she sat glowing and fragrant, and her eyes were mirrors of the light. I dropped my paddle.

"Tell me more about yourself. Talk to me. Tell me of your childhood," I breathed.

She put out her hand. "Monsieur! Our contract!"

I let the canoe drift. "Madame, tell me the truth. Why do you hold yourself so detached from me? Is it — Madame, is it because you fear that we shall learn to love each other, — to love against our wills?"

She looked down. "It would be a tragedy if we did, monsieur."

"You would think it a tragedy to learn to love me?"

"It could be nothing else, monsieur."

The breeze took us where it willed. The mother-of-pearl shimmer of evening was turning the headlands to mist, and the air smelled

of cedar and pine. Tiny waves lapped complainingly on the sides of our rocking canoe. I leaned forward.

"Listen, madame, you know life. You know how little is often given under the bond of marriage. You know how men and women live long lives together though completely sundered in heart, and how others though separated in life walk side by side in the spirit. As this is so, why do you fear to see or know too much of me? Propinquity does not create love."

Still she looked down. "Men say that it does, monsieur."

"Then why are so many marriages unhappy? No, madame, you know better than that. And you know that if love should grow between us it would sweep away your toy barriers like paper. Nearness or absence would not affect it. Madame, let me have your hand."

"No, no! Monsieur, I do not know you."

"You shall know me better. Come, what is a hand? There. Madame, would you prefer, from now on, to travel in hardship with me rather than be left in comfort here?"

"I should indeed, monsieur."

"Then you shall go with me."

"But your work, monsieur!"

I released her hand and picked up my paddle. "I see that Indian tribes are not my only con-

cern," I explained. "I have other matters to conquer. We shall not be separated from now on."

She did not answer, and I paddled home in silence with my eyes on her face. As we landed, she gave me her hand.

"I do not care for supper, and am going to my house. Good-night, monsieur."

I bowed over her hand. "Are you glad that you are to travel with me and know me better? Are you glad, madame?"

She smiled a little. "I — I think so, monsieur."

"You are not sure? Think of it to-night. Perhaps you will tell me to-morrow. Will you tell me to-morrow, madame?"

She drew back into the dusk. "Perhaps — to-morrow. Good-night, monsieur."

I walked through the meadow. I would not eat supper and I would not work. Finally I called Simon. He was a strange, quiet man, not as strong as the others of the crew, but of use to me for his knowledge of woodcraft. As a boy he had been held captive by the Mohawks, and he was almost as deft of hand and eye as they.

"Have you seen any sign or sound of Indian or white men in these three weeks?" I asked him.

He looked at me rather sullenly. "Yes. A

canoe went through here one night about a week ago."

"Who was in it?"

"I do not know."

"You should have followed."

"I did."

"You should have reported to me."

He glowered at me with the eye of a rebellious panther. "I watched. The master went away." Then he showed his teeth in open defiance. "I watched every night on the beach. The master slept or went away."

I opened my mouth to order him under guard, but I did not form the words. I thought of the way that he had spent his days working on the delicately fashioned canoe and his nights in keeping guard. And all for the woman. Women make mischief in the wilderness. I grew pitiful.

"Watch again to-night," I said kindly, "and you shall sleep to-morrow. Simon, I thought that I heard the sound of an axe off the south shore to-day. I shall take the small canoe at daybreak and see what I can find. Tell the camp I have gone fishing. I shall return by noon. And, Simon" —

"Yes, master."

"Madame de Montlivet is your special care till I return."

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE MIST

I SLIPPED off in grayness the next morning. There was a water fog that hugged me clammily, and sounds echoed in it as in a metal canopy. I could not have found my way in open water, but here I could crowd tight to the shore and keep my bearings. I took a keg of pitch with me, for when I saw the weather I knew that I would give the canoe many a scrape on rocks and snags.

It was tedious traveling, and it seemed a long time before I made my worming way around every inequality in the shore and reached the inlet where we had eaten lunch. Here I lifted the canoe, turned it bottom side up in the meadow, and covered it with a sailcloth. I wanted it to dry, and the air was still dripping moisture. I had expected the fog to lift before this, but it seemed to be growing heavier.

I tried to light my pipe, but the tobacco was damp and would not burn. Slow drops dribbled from the trees and the meadow was soggy. Where should I go? I could hear nothing, and as for seeing anything I could have passed my

own camp a rod away. It began to seem a fool's errand. I thought of returning.

Perhaps it was a boyish feeling that took me to the sycamore. I looked about. The ashes of our little fire still lay in a rounded pile, and at the edge of the pile, printed deep in the yielding surface, was a moccasin print. It was not the woman's moccasin, nor my own boot. One look showed me that.

And then I went over the surrounding ground. I learned nothing, for pebbles and short grass are as non-committal as a Paris pavement. The print had been made before the mist fell, for the dew was unbrushed. I looked at the encircling forest, and its dripping uniformity gave no clue. I knocked the charred tobacco from my pipe, pulled my hat down on my ears, and plunged straight ahead.

It was a fool's way of going at the matter, but a fool has as good a chance as a philosopher in such a case. I clove my way through the mist as blind and breathless as a swimmer in a breaker. The forest was thickly grown and the trees stood about me as alike as water-reeds. Whenever I touched one it pelted me with drops, and I was numbed with cold. My feet slipped, for the ground was slimy with wet. But I was not thinking of comfort, nor of speed. I was listening.

For the strange, gray air was trembling with echoes. Every snapped twig, every bird murmur, every brush of a padded foot on leaf mould was multiplied many-fold. The fog was a sounding-board. All the spectral space around me, above me, below me was quivering and talking. My very breath was peopled with murmurs. I have been in many fogs, but none like this one. If the spirits of the dead should revisit us, they would whisper, I think, as the air whispered around me then.

How long I groped, learning nothing, I do not know, for when the mind forgets the body minutes may be long or short, and no count is taken of them. But at last among the noises that knocked at my ear came a new note. I heard a human voice.

And then, indeed, I pressed all my faculties into service. I put my ear to the wet ground and strained it against tree trunks, trying to weed out the myriad tiny whisperings that assailed me and grasp that one sound that I wanted and hold it clear. And at last I heard it unmistakably; there were voices, more than one it seemed.

My ears buzzed with my effort to listen. I heard the sound, lost it, then heard it again. It was like a child's game. I heard it, blundered after it, then it disappeared. I turned to

go back, and it came behind and mocked me. It was everywhere and nowhere. It came near, then faded into silence. The fog suffocated me; I found myself pressing at it with my hands.

Yet on the whole I made progress. In time the voices grew clearer. There were several of them, perhaps many. I heard shouting, — orders, presumably, — and once a clink of metal, — an iron kettle it might have been. But the sound was back of me, in front of me, at the sides of me, above me. I could not hold it. It reverberated like the drumming of a woodcock that comes to the ear from four quarters at once. And all the time the fog pressed on my eyelids like a hand.

I had left my musket hidden under the canoe, for I could not have used it in the dampness, so I had only my knife for guard. I carried it open, and made an occasional notch upon a tree. Once I came to a notched tree a second time. The old woodland madness was on me, and I was stepping in circles. Yet the sounds were growing clearer. They were approaching, though I could not tell from what quarter. I stood still.

What followed was like a dream; like the dream that I had had the night after the storm when I woke with sweat cold on me. The fog pinioned me like a clammy winding-sheet; I

could see nothing; I was too chilled to feel; I was as alone and powerless as a lost canoe in the ocean; but somewhere on earth or in air I heard a company of men pass me by. The sounds were unmistakable. I heard the swish of wet leaves, the pad of feet, and even the creak of the damp leather of the carrying-straps. Something cracked, pricking in my ears in a blur of sound, and I knew that the men had brushed a branch with the canoe that they were carrying on their heads. They were near me; at any moment they might come within touch of my hand. But where were they? Whoever they were, whatever they were, the wish to see them became an obsession. I knew no feeling but my tingling to get at them. I pushed to right and left. I knocked against trees. The sounds were here, then there. I could not reach them. They taunted me as lost spirits tantalize a soul in purgatory. Whichever way I turned they were just out of my grasp. I clenched my hands and swore that I would not be beaten.

But my pitiful little oath was all bluster and impotent defiance. I was as helpless as a squirming puppy held by the neck. I ran like a madman, but I ran the wrong way. The invisible crew passed me, and their voices faded. I heard them melt, melt into nothing. A sound, an impression, — that had been all. Not even

a gray shadow on the fog to show that I had not been dreaming. I looked at my skinned knuckles and disordered clothes, and a strange feeling shook me. A certain rashness of temperament had all my life made me contemptuous of fear. But this was different. I tried to laugh at myself, but could not.

It was a simple matter to retrace my route, for I had left a trail like a behemoth's. And one thought I chewed all the way back to the meadow. If I could have done it over again I should have called, and so have drawn whatever thing it was toward me. That would have been dangerous, and I might have paid the forfeit of a head that was not my own to part with, but at least I should have seen what thing it was that passed me in the fog. There began to be something that was not wholly sound and sane in the depth of my feeling that I ought, at whatever cost, to have confronted that noise and forced it to declare itself.

When I came to the meadow it was wet and spectral. The fog had lifted somewhat and now the air was curiously luminous. It appeared transparent, as if the vision could pierce far-stretching reaches, but when I tried to peer ahead I found my glance baffled a few feet away. It was as if the world ended suddenly, exhaled in grayness, just beyond the reach of

my hand. It made objects remote and unreal and singularly shining. I looked toward the sycamore, and my heart beat fast for a moment, for I thought that a pool of fresh blood lay in the grass where the woman and I had sat the day before. But I looked again and saw that it was only the bunch of red lilies that she had plucked and worn and thrown away. I had told her that their red was the color of war, and she had let them drop to the ground. I went to them and picked them up, and they left heavy, scarlet stains upon my fingers.

When I went to the canoe I found it still damp, but I uncovered it and went to work to do what I could with the frayed seams. An unreasoning haste had possession of me, and I worked fumblingly and badly, like a man with fear behind him. Yet I was not afraid. I was consumed by the feeling that I must get back to camp and to the woman without delay.

Kneeling to my work with my back to the forest, strange noises came behind and begged attention. But I would not look up. I had had enough of visions and whisperings and a haunted wood. I wanted my canoe and my paddle and a chance to shoot straight and to get home. For already I thought of the camp as home, and of this meadow as a place where I had been held for a long time. It was a strange morning.

And so it was that even when I heard the thud, thud of a man's step behind me I did not turn. A man's step is unlike an animal's, and I had no doubt in my heart that a man was coming. But let him come to me. My immediate and pressing concern was to repair my canoe that I might get to camp, and I would squander neither movement nor eyesight till that was done. A few moments before it had seemed a vital matter to find what creatures they were that whispered and rustled past me in the grayness. Now my anxiety was transferred.

The echoing fog played witchcraft with the step as it had done with the other noises. The sound came, came, came, — a steady, moderate note; no haste, no dallying, no indecision. Quiet, purposeful, controlled, it sounded; that pace, pace, that came through the twig-carpeted timber. The Greek Fates were pictured as moving with just that even relentlessness of stride. Yet in life, so far as I have seen it, tragedies commonly pounce upon us, like a wolfish cat upon her prey, and we find ourselves stunned and mangled before we gather dignity to meet the blow. I thought of this, in an incoherent, muddy way, as the step came nearer. And I worked with hurrying hands at the canoe.

Then came a voice. No whispering, no rust-

ling, nothing vague and formless and haunting, but a low, commanding call:—

"Bonjour, mon ami."

I did not start. If I turned slowly it was because I knew what was waiting me, and was adjusting several possibilities to meet it. It was a man's voice that called, yet its every inflection was familiar, familiar as the beating of my heart. For madame, my wife, had called to me more or less often in the twin of that voice with its slurring deliberateness and its insolent disregard of the pitfall accents of a foreign tongue. And now I turned to meet her cousin, the man whom she had promised to marry; the man who had deserted her to the knives of savages; the man whom she despised and yet feared, and who now called to me in a voice that was hers and yet was not; that haunted and repelled, all in one. I did not think out any of this by rule and line. I only knew that I dreaded meeting this man who was stepping, stepping into my life through the fog, and that I turned to meet him with my heart like ice but my brain on fire.

I had ado to keep my tongue from exclaiming when I turned. I do not know why I expected the man to be small, except that I myself am overly large, and that I was looking for him to be my antithesis in every way. But the figure

that loomed toward me out of the luminous mist dwarfed my own stature. Never had my eyes seen so powerful a man. Long and swinging as an elk, he had the immense, humped shoulders of a buffalo and the length of arm of a baboon. His head would have sat well on some rough bronze coin of an early day. Semitic in type he looked, with his eagle-beaked nose and prominent cheek bones, but the blue of his eyes was English. They were intelligent eyes.

He looked at me a moment, and I stood silent for his initiative. I remembered that I was dressed roughly, was torn and rumpled by my contest with the forest, and that I must appear an out-at-elbows *coureur de bois*. He would not know me for the man he was seeking. I waited for him to ask my name, and selected one to give him that was my own and yet was not M. de Montlivet. Since names cannot be sold nor squandered, my father had bequeathed me a plethora of them.

But I credited the Englishman with too little acuteness. He stepped forward. "This is Monsieur de Montlivet?"

I could do no less than bow, but I kept my hand by my side. "And you, monsieur?"

He smiled as at one indulging a childish skirmish of wits; but controlled as his face was, I could see the relief that overspread it at my

admission. "My name is Starling. I have a packet for you, monsieur," and he handed me Cadillac's letter.

I hated the farce of the whole affair, and when I ran my eye over Cadillac's message, which I could forecast word for word, I felt like a play-acting fool. But I read it and put it in my pocket.

"You have had a long trip, Lord Starling," I said, with some show of courtesy. "It is new to see a man of your nation in this land!"

He waved me and my words into limbo. "Where is the Englishman, — the prisoner?"

A folded blanket lay beside the canoe, and I shook it out and spread it on the dew-drenched grass. "Will you sit, Lord Starling? Forgive me if I smoke. It is unusual grace to meet a man of my own station, and I would enjoy it in my own way. Will you do the same? I see you have your pipe."

He swung his great arm like a war club. "Where is the prisoner?"

I sat on the red blanket and filled my pipe. "I know of no prisoner."

I thought he would have broken into oaths, but instead he shrugged his shoulders. He walked to the other side of the blanket, and I saw that he limped painfully. Then he sat down opposite me, his great turtle neck standing up between

his humping shoulders. With all his size and ugliness he was curiously well finished, — a personality. He was a man to sway men and women. I felt it as I felt his likeness to his cousin, a likeness that I could not put my finger on but that I knew was there. Small wonder that she dreaded him. He was a replica in heavy lines of the sterner traits in her own nature. He had something of her curiously winning quality, too. Did she feel that? She had promised to marry him. I lit my pipe and smoked, and waited for him to declare himself.

He did it with his glance hard on me. "You are playing for time. Is that worthy your very evident intelligence, monsieur, since you can protract the game only the matter of a few hours at most? I have Cadillac's warrant for the prisoner."

I smoked. I felt no haste for speech. What I had to say would make a brutal, tearing wound, and I hugged my sense of power and gloated over it like an Iroquois. A woman was between us, and I knew no mercy.

My silence appeared to amuse him. He studied me and looked unhurried and reflective. He stretched out a long, yellow arm in simulation of contented weariness. "I wonder why you wish to keep the prisoner with you longer," he marveled.

And then I laughed. I looked him full in the face and laughed again. "But I have no prisoner. Unless, indeed, matrimony be a sort of bondage. I travel with my wife, with Madame de Montlivet, née Starling, monsieur."

I knew that I had cut him in a vital part, but he held himself well. An oath burst from him, but it did not move his great, immobile face into betraying lines. Yet when he tried to speak his voice trailed off in an unmeaning rattle. He tried twice, and his hands were sweat-beaded. Then he heaved his great bulk upward and stood over me, his baboon arms reaching for my throat.

"The marriage was honest? Speak."

I could respect that feeling. "Father Nouvel married us," I replied. "We found him at the Pottawatamie Islands. I marvel that you did not hear news of us from there, monsieur."

He sank back on the blanket. "I did not go there. I sprained my ankle." He talked still with that curious rattling in his voice. "I lost time and the damned Indians left me. When did you discover" —

"I married madame as soon as I discovered. Monsieur, you are of her family. I can assure you that I have shown your cousin all the respect and consideration in my power."

He looked at me as if I were some smirking

carpet knight who prated of conventions when a man was dying.

"Where is she?"

"In my camp, monsieur."

"Take me to her."

"Monsieur, I must refuse."

He opened his mouth with a look that cursed me, but before the words came he thought twice and changed his front. He spoke calmly. "I am her guardian and her cousin. I was her intended husband. You are a gentleman. I ask you to bring me to my cousin, monsieur."

His tone of calm possession fired me. I remembered what he was, and I enumerated his titles in order.

"Yes. You are the guardian who would have married her for her estates; you are the cousin who played the poltroon and outraged her pride of family; you are the lover who abandoned her, — abandoned her to torture and the tomahawk. Is it strange that it is her wish never to see you? You will spare your pride some hurts if you avoid her in the future, monsieur."

The great face turned yellow to the eyes. "She told you this?"

"I am no mind reader, monsieur."

And then he turned away. I took one glimpse of his face and knew it was not decent to look a second time. He had done a hideous thing,

but he was having a hideous punishment. Nature had formed him for a proud man, and he had lived arrogantly, secure of homage. I wondered now that he could live at all.

And so I went to work at the canoe, and waited till he should turn to me. When he did it was with a child's plea for pity, and the abjectness of his tone was horrible, coming from a man of his girth and power.

"You might have done the same thing yourself, monsieur."

I bowed. I could not but toss him that bone of comfort, for it was the truth. Sometimes a spring snaps suddenly in a man, and he becomes a brute. How could I boast that I would be immune?

"But I would have shot myself the moment after," I said.

He had regained his level. "Then you would have been a double coward. I shall do better."

"You think to reinstate yourself?"

"I know that I shall reinstate myself. Monsieur, I throw myself upon your courtesy. I ask to be taken to my cousin."

"No, monsieur. I follow my wife's wishes."

"I loved her, monsieur."

My pity of the moment before was gone like vapor. I looked up from my canoe, and took the man's measure. "I think not. You loved

something, I grant. Her wit, perhaps, her money, the pleasure she gave your epicure's taste. But you did not love her, the woman. My God, if you loved her how could you endure to scatter her likeness broadcast among the savages as you did? To make that profile, that mouth, that chin, the jest and property of a greasy Indian! No, you shall not see my wife, monsieur."

He changed no line at my outburst. "Then I shall follow by force. I shall sit here till you move, monsieur."

I shrugged. "A rash promise. Are your provisions close at hand?"

He looked at me steadfastly. "Then you absolutely refuse to take me to her?"

"I refuse."

"Yet I shall reach her."

I took moss from my pocket and calked a seam with some precision. I did not speak.

"You think that I cannot reach her?"

I smiled. There was a womanish vein in the man that he should press me in this fashion for a useless answer. I began to see his weakness as well as his obvious strength. I waited till he asked yet again.

"You think that I shall not be able to reach your wife, monsieur?"

And then I shrugged and examined him over

my pipe-bowl. "Yes, you will reach her, I think. You have a certain persistence that often wins small issues, — seldom large ones. But I shall not help you."

"I shall stay here till you go."

"Then we shall be companions for some time. May I offer you tobacco, monsieur?"

He smiled, though wryly and against his will. It was plain that we were taking a certain saturnine enjoyment out of the situation. We could hate each other well, and we were doing it, but we were both starved for men's talk, — the talk of equals.

"It seems a pity to detain you," he mused. "You are obviously on business. When I came up behind you I thought that I had never seen a man work in such a frenzy of haste. There was sweat on your forehead."

I waved my pipe at him. I had the upper hand, and I felt cruelly jovial. "It was haste to meet you," I assured him. "I missed you in the fog, and feared you would reach camp before me."

"You feared me, monsieur?"

I felt an unreasoning impulse to be candid with him. The strange, choking terror had swept back at that instant, and again it had me by the throat. Yet here sat the cause of my terror before me, and he was in my power.

"I feared your Indians." I spoke gravely. "Handle those Hurons carefully, monsieur. It is a tricky breed."

"But I have no" — He stopped, and looked at me strangely. "What made you think that I was near?"

"For one thing I heard your axe yesterday."

"But yesterday I was five leagues from here."

I whistled through my teeth. I hate a useless lie. "I heard your axe," I reiterated. "This morning you and your men passed me in the fog."

He stared at me, then at the forest. "Monsieur, I have no men!"

"What?"

"I came alone."

"Monsieur, you are lying."

"It is you who are mad. Take your hands away!"

"I will let you go when you tell me the truth. Remember, your men passed me this morning."

"I tell you, I came alone."

"Where are your Indians that Cadillac sent with you?"

"I sprained my ankle and they left me."

"Where did they go?"

"How should I know? I tell you they left me."

"Was Pemaou, the Huron, one of them?"

"He was guide. Monsieur, what do you mean?"

I could not answer. My throat was dry as if I breathed a furnace blast. I looked at the canoe under my hands. It was not seaworthy. "Will your canoe carry two?" I cried.

He nodded. His great rough face was sickly with suspense. "Monsieur, what does this mean?"

I swore at him and at the hour he had made me lose. "Men passed me in a fog. They have been hiding here for a day at least. Show me your canoe. We must get to camp. Yes, come with me. Come, show me your canoe."

CHAPTER XX

WHAT I FOUND

Once in the canoe I bade Lord Starling crouch low, and I paddled fiercely. I breathed hard not from exertion, but like a swimmer fighting for his breath. I was submerged in waves of terror, yet I had no name for what I feared. I learned then that there is but one real terror in the world, — fear of the unseen. The man who feels terror of an open foe must be a strange craven.

Lord Starling respected my mood and was silent. He sat warily, shifting his weight to suit the plunging canoe.

"The fog chokes me," he said at length. "How large a camp have you? Whom did you leave on guard?"

I told him.

"That should be sufficient."

"Not for a concerted attack."

"But who would make a concerted attack?"

I lengthened my stroke till the canoe quivered. "I am not sure. I have been shadowed. I thought it was by your order. I cannot talk and paddle, monsieur."

But I could paddle and think. And always I saw the meadow as we had found it that first day with drifts of white butterflies over the flowers, and the woods warm and beckoning. How would the meadow look now?

But when we came to it I thought it looked unchanged, save that the fog made all things sinister. We crashed through the guarding reeds, and I let the canoe drive hard upon the sand. No one was in sight, and a wolf was whining at the edge of the timber. I leaped to the shore.

I think that I called as I stumbled forward. I saw the ashes of a dead fire, and a cask that had held rum lying with the sides and end knocked in. Then I saw a dead body.

I did not hasten then. My feet crawled. The body lay sprawled and limp with its outstretched fingers clutching. One hand pointed toward the woman's cabin.

I turned the corpse over. It was Simon. His scarlet head was still dripping, but his face was untouched. I saw that he had died despairing, and I laid him back with a prayer on my lips but with the lust to kill in my heart.

I went through the cabins quickly but methodically. I think that I made no sound of grief or excitement, but I knew indefinitely that Lord Starling was following me, and that, at hor-

ribly measured intervals, he gave short, panting groans. But I did not speak to him, nor he to me.

I spoke for the first time at the woman's cabin. I looked within and saw that it was untouched; then I put out my arm and barred Lord Starling's way.

"I have never stepped in here, and you shall not," I told him with my jaws set, and I think that I struck him across the face, though of that I have never been quite sure.

In my own lodge I found havoc. Bales had been broken open, and my papers were thrown and trampled. Many of the papers were blood-smeared.

I examined every cabin and every bale, then went to the ashes of the camp fire and stood still. Lord Starling followed, and I heard his smothered groan. I took out my knife.

"I shall kill you if you make that noise again," I said.

I think that I spoke quietly, but he stepped back. I saw that he was afraid, — afraid of losing his miserable, mistaken life, — and I laughed. I laughed for a long time. Hearing myself laugh, I knew that it sounded as if I were near insanity, but I was not. My head had never been clearer.

Perhaps Lord Starling conquered his fear.

He came nearer and lifted his magnificent, compelling bulk above me.

"Listen!" he began. "We have been foes; we shall be again; but now we are knit closer than eye and brain in a common cause. I will deal with you with absolute truth as with my own right hand. Tell me. Tell me, in God's mercy! What do you know? Who did this? What can we do?"

His voice was judicial, but I saw his great frame swaying like a shambling ox. I marveled that he could show emotion. My own body felt dead.

"The woman has been taken away," my stiff, strange voice explained. "So far they have not harmed her."

"How do you know?"

"There are no marks of struggle. Simon resisted, and they killed him. The other men surrendered. The Indians wanted prisoners, not scalps."

"Was it Pemaou and his Hurons?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"He left a broken spear in my lodge. There was bad blood between us once, and I broke the spear in two and tossed the pieces at him, telling him to keep them, — to keep them, for we should meet again. I humbled him. Now it is his

jest. He is a capable Indian. He seems to have outwitted even you, monsieur."

Because I spoke as one dead he thought I needed leading. He took me by the arm and would have guided me gently to the canoe.

"Come, Monsieur de Montlivet, you must rouse yourself. We must start in pursuit."

I shook him off. "Sit here where it is dry. You need your strength. We have hours to get through here before we leave, and little to do to help us through the time. We must wait here for Pierre."

"What do you mean? We must go at once."

"No, we wait for Pierre. It may be dusk before he returns. I sent him over the portage yesterday with orders to explore some leagues to the south. We must wait for him. He can tell us whether Pemaou went east by way of the portage."

"But we lose time!"

"We gain it. If Pemaou did not go by way of the portage, he went west. He would not dare go north, for fear of the Pottawatamies, and he would have no object in going south. He went east or west. We can learn from Pierre."

The man's shoulders heaved. "Your men were cowards," he muttered.

I looked at him. So a coward could despise

a coward! "My men were wise," I corrected. "With Simon killed there were only two men left, — one, rather, for Leclerc is a nonentity. Labarthe, left alone, was wise to surrender. He is skillful with Indians. Monsieur, tell me of your dealings with Pemaou. Tell me your trip here. I need details."

He measured me. "You dictate, monsieur?"

I pointed to Simon's body. "That is my claim."

He gulped at that, and turned his back on the red horror to fix his steady, critical gaze on my face. "After the massacre," he began, with an effort, "I followed many false trails. I went to Quebec, to Montreal. All this has nothing to do with what you wish to know. But at Montreal I first heard rumors of an English prisoner who was being carried westward. That sent me to Michillimackinac."

"You heard this rumor through the priests?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I thought so. It is fortunate for the success of your somewhat complicated plans that you are a Catholic and a Jacobite."

"Is there a slur in that remark, monsieur?"

"Not unless the facts themselves are insulting. Our priests would see no hidden purpose in your story. They would be predisposed in favor of a Catholic and follower of James. They would

give you letters where a commandant would not. It was good policy to go to them."

"But, monsieur, I am a Catholic!"

"Which, I repeat, is fortunate."

"Monsieur, this is wanton insult. Are you trying to pick a quarrel with me here, here with this tragedy around us? It is a dog's trick. I will not fight you."

Again I took out my knife. "I will not fight you here, — here with this tragedy around us, — but I may kill you. I shall do it if you do not tell me this story fairly. I care nothing for your life, and I need this story. I will have it if I have to choke it out of your throat."

"I am trying to tell you the story, monsieur."

"No. You are telling me a pleasant fairy tale of a love-lorn knight searching the wilderness for his lost mistress. A moving tale, monsieur, but not the true one. I want the real story. The story of the English spy who wishes to ransom his cousin, but who also treats secretly with the Hurons, — who treats with Pemaou, monsieur. Tell me his story."

His face did not alter. "You believe me a spy?"

"I have reason, monsieur."

Still he regarded me. "You might be right, but you are not. Monsieur, I am a broken man. I want nothing but my cousin. If there is in-

trigue around me I do not know it. I am telling you the truth."

I fought hard against the man's fascination, his splendid, ruined pomp. "You must have a code," I burst out. "There must be something you hold dear. Will you swear to me by the name of the woman that you have not had secret dealings with the Hurons?"

"I swear."

"But the profile that the Huron carried!"

"Those pictures I scattered broadcast. You will find them among the Algonquins, and the Ottawas of the upper river. My cousin has a distinctive profile. I offered rewards for news of any one — man or woman — who looked like the face that I had drawn."

I put out my hand. "I hope that I have wronged you, monsieur."

He bowed and touched my fingers. His own were icy, yet he shivered at the chill of mine. "Pemaou would not dare harm the woman. Monsieur de Montlivet, you know Indians. Surely Pemaou would not dare?"

I gripped my knife. "No man knows Indians! Where did you see Pemaou first?"

"At Michillimackinac. When I reached there and learned that the prisoner had gone with you I sent interpreters through the camps with offers of reward for news of your where-

abouts. Pemaou came. He said he could locate you and I took him as guide."

"He selected his own escort?"

"Yes."

"And you traveled slowly?"

"Very slowly."

I fingered my pipe and bit hard at its stem. "Pemaou has played carefully. He had the woman captured and brought to camp. The time was not ripe for him to use her, so he let me carry her away. But he has had me shadowed. You played well into his hands, for you furnished blankets and provisions. He had no intention of letting you find us. We are equal dupes. I see that I wronged you, monsieur."

He looked down, his breath laboring. I could look at him now without recoil, for a common humiliation bound us. We were white and we had been tricked by a savage. We sat in heavy silence.

At last Starling spoke dully. "Why did Pemaou wait so long?"

I gripped my knife the closer. "That we shall learn when we learn what he has done with the woman."

He looked up with his jaw shaking. "Monsieur, we must make haste."

But I shook my head. "Monsieur, no. We must await Pierre."

The fog was withdrawing. It was noon, and I rose and made ready a grave for Simon. I chose a spot under a pine where I had seen the woman sit, and I dug deep as my crude implements would permit. Then I piled stones on the mound. The Englishman helped me, and together we said a prayer. We did not comment till our work was over. Then Starling looked down at the mound.

"I wonder why he was killed? The others surrendered."

I shrugged a trifle bitterly. "He loved the woman. It was not her fault. I doubt that she knew it, and she could not help it. But it cost him his life, for it made him attempt to carry a forlorn hope. And she never even knew. It is suicide to love a woman hopelessly, monsieur."

It was hideous when we went back to our seats by the ashes. The sun had come out hot and nauseating, and the flies buzzed horribly. We tried to crowd down food, but we could not swallow. We sat and chewed on our despairing thoughts, and hate that was a compound of physical faintness and sick uncertainty rose between us.

The Englishman took a miniature from his pocket and handed it to me.

"She gave it to me herself," he said. "With laughter and with kisses, monsieur."

I tried to wave the picture away, but I had not strength to resist looking. It was no profile that I saw. The brown eyes looked full in mine; merry eyes, challenging, fun-crowded, innocent. There were no sombre shadows there. There was spirit in plenty, but no sorrow. White shoulders rose from clouds of pink gauze, and the hair was powdered and pearl-wreathed and piled high in a coronet. It was not the face of the woman that I knew. I said so, and returned the portrait to the Englishman.

He could not resist baiting me. "You do not like it, monsieur?"

I shook my head. "It is nothing to me. It is the face of a laughing, trusting, untouched girl. I have never seen her."

"You say that you married her."

"Monsieur, this is a girl. I married a woman, a woman matured by tragedy. The eyes that are laughing in this portrait are wiser now. They have seen the depths of a man's treachery. But they have not lost their spirit, no, nor their tenderness, monsieur. You will find little that you recognize in the woman who is now my wife."

He kept his composure. "You use the word 'wife' very glibly," he said, with a yawn. "Do you use it when the lady is within hearing, as you do now?"

"She is my wife."

He laughed, for he saw he had drawn blood. "Your wife in name, perhaps, — I grant you that, — but not in fact. Do you think me blind that I should not see the two cabins. And you said that you had never crossed the threshold of the woman's room. I see that I shall find my cousin the maiden that I left her, monsieur."

I kept my lips closed. He had indeed drawn blood. I could not answer. He leaned forward and tapped a significant forefinger on my knee.

"Remember, she has kissed me, monsieur. She has kissed me often of her own will."

And then my spirit did return. "That does not concern me."

He lifted his great lip. "You are indulgent."

The flies buzzed odiously. The Englishman was gloating over me, his great head craned forward like a buzzard's. My brain took fire.

"I am not indulgent," I said slowly, with my throat dry. "I am wise. She has kissed you, yes. I have no doubt that she has kissed you many times, casually, lightly, indifferently. She brushed the plumage of her falcon in the same way. You are welcome to the memory of those kisses, my lord. You may have more like them in the future, and I shall not say you nay. They mean nothing."

He scowled at me. "What do you know of her kisses?" he said under his breath.

I looked him in the eye. "I know this. There is but one kiss that means anything from a woman, and she gives it, if she is the right kind of a woman, to but one man in her life. For the rest, — I value them no more than the brush of her finger-tips. Tell me, have you felt her lips pressed to yours till her breath and her soul were one with you? Tell me that. Answer, I say."

I had let the cord of reason and decency slip. I rose, and I think that the hate in my face must have been wolfish, for the man drew back. He tried to look contemptuous, but I saw fear in his eyes. Fear and something more, — a sudden pain and longing. The emotion that heretofore he had kept well in hand trapped him for the moment. I was answered. The woman might never be mine, but she had never been his, either. I turned away. I was triumphant, but I loathed myself. I was sick with the situation, and the man who had brought me to it.

"You may keep your kisses, monsieur," I said savagely. "You may keep them. But if you mention them to me again I shall throttle you where you stand."

The Englishman had felt the revulsion, and he showed no resentment of my heat. He

heaved himself up in the hot, horrible sunshine and rubbed his hands as if washing them free.

"We are curs," he said quietly.

I could not say nay. "We must eat," I cautioned; "we must eat, and keep ourselves sane. If we can get through this day without murder or worse, we shall have work to do from now on that will serve to keep our heads clear. Pierre will be coming soon now."

Starling was regarding me keenly. "You lose your temper, and therefore you should be easy to read," he said reflectively. "But you are not. You evidently married my cousin for convenience. I can understand the situation. But you stand by your bargain well. You have the honor of your name somewhat sensitively at heart. But if you had not married her — If there were no compulsion, no outside reason — tell me, would you marry her now?"

But that I left unanswered.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PIVOT

PIERRE came at five o'clock. He was keen for the approaching supper hour and came jovially.

I was sick with haste, and deep sunk in my own grief, so I was cruel and a fool; I plumped the facts at him without a softening word. And so I frustrated my own ends. The great, slow creature cowered and grew dumb under my story. Then he went, great-eyed and hanging-lipped, from cabin to cabin. I had locked up his springs of word and thought.

But one thing my sword and my words prodded out of him. He had come by the portage path from the east, and had seen no marks of passage that were less than a week old. Our star led west.

I baled .what provision and ammunition we needed, loaded the canoes, and cached the furs and the balance of the stores at the edge of the forest. At six o'clock we were afloat. I led the way, and Pierre followed with the Englishman. This gave me space to think in silence.

The sun sank red and clear, and we paddled from a colored dusk to a clear starlight. I knew

this dimly, as the lost in the inferno know the barred joys above them. Unless we found Pemaou within the next few hours I should never be one with the loveliness of nature again.

I held my way due west to the Malhominis. I could secure their coöperation, if nothing more. Pierre followed at a canoe length, and we traveled unbrokenly. It was an hour short of midnight when we saw the west shore. I could take no bearings in the dim light, so we nosed along, uncertain whether to go north or south to find the mouth of the Wild Rice River where the Malhominis had their home. We held a short colloquy and started northward. Suddenly Pierre shot his canoe beside my own.

"A camp!" he breathed in a giant whisper.

I suspended my paddle. On the shore to the north of us were lights. It could not be the Malhominis, for they lived inland; it was not Pemaou, for the camp was many times larger than his would be. It was probably a hunting party. All the western tribes were friendly; more, they were my allies. I saw no necessity for caution. I raised a long halloo, and our canoes raced toward the lights.

We landed in a medley. Indians sprang from the squatting groups around the fire and ran to meet us. They were black shapes that I could not recognize. I leaped from my canoe

and held up my hand in greeting. But an arm reached out and tore my musket from me. I looked up. A leering Iroquois stood over me.

I dropped my arms and stood passive. A look over my shoulder told me that Pierre and Starling had been seized and were fighting well.

"Caution!" I called. "Do not resist. Watch me."

"Where are we? What does it mean?" Starling called back. His voice was shaking.

I held out my arms to be bound. "The Iroquois!" I shouted to Pierre in dialect. "I did not know there were any within a thousand miles. Keep steady. Follow me. We may find Pemaou here."

The Indians bound us systematically, but without undue elation, so that I judged that they had many captives. They were Senecas and had the look of picked men. I understood their speech, but beyond ribald jests at our expense they said nothing. It was all swift, unreal. Owls hooted in the woods and dogs snarled at us. The groups that remained by the fire peered in our direction, but were too lethargic to come near. I tried for a word with Starling. I feared for his spirit.

"They are Senecas," I managed to say to him; "the most diplomatic nation of the Iroquois

league. They will not butcher us without consideration. Keep cool."

He nodded with some patronage. He looked impressive, unshaken; yet the moment before he had been terror-stricken. I saw that I did not understand him, after all.

Having bound us, our captors raised a shout and shouldered us toward the camp. A young brave capered before us, beating his breast and singing. The braves by the fire took up the cry.

And so we were pushed into the circle of flaming light. The Indians crowded to us, and pressed their oily, grinning faces so near that I felt their breath. I stumbled over refuse, and dirt-crusted dogs blocked my way. The mangled carcass of a deer lay on the ground, and the stench of fresh blood mingled with the reek of the camp. Yet I saw only one thing clearly. In the midst of it stood the woman and Singing Arrow.

My relief caught at my throat, and the cry I gave was hoarse and strangled. But the woman heard it. My first look had shown me not only that she was unharmed, but that she was undaunted, that she stood white-faced in all the grime, and held herself above it, a thing of spirit that soil could not reach. Yet when she saw me, the cry that came from her in answer changed her from an effigy to something so warm and living that I forgot where I stood,

and stopped my breath to hold her gaze to mine, and drink the moment to the full. We stood with captivity between us and torture at our elbow, but the woman looked only at me, and her lips grew red and tremulous, and her breath came fast. "You are safe. You are safe." I heard the words even among the babel, and I pulled like a wild animal at my bonds to free myself and reach her side.

But I was held fast, and while I struggled came a mighty cry from behind me, "Mary! Mary! Mary!" Starling's Goliath frame pushed by me, and his captors were hurled like pygmies to each side.

The woman was unprepared. She cried at sight of him with a deep throaty terror that sent the blood to my brain. Starling would have pressed himself to her, but she put out her unbound arms and fended him away. And then he stood with his great height bowed and pleaded to her. I had shrugged at the English for their hard reserve, but when I heard this man I learned again that it is always the dammed torrent that is to be feared. Even the Indians heard in silence.

The silence lasted. Never before nor since have I known savages to take the background and let two whites play out a tragedy unchecked. But now they formed a ring and watched.

They forgot their interest in me and let me go. I could stand unheeded. An old man threw tinder on the fire, and we saw each other's faces as in the searching, red light of a storm. I watched the cords in Starling's neck tighten and relax as he talked on and on.

The drama was in pantomime to me, as to the Indians, for the cousins spoke in English. But I could understand the woman's face. She spoke in monosyllables, but I could have pitied any other man for the gulf she put between them by her look. She was more than scornful; torn and disheveled as she was, she was cruelly radiant, her eyes black-lined and her lips hard. She was unassailable. And when she met her kinsman's eye I gloried in her till I could have laid my cheek on the ground at her feet.

It was plain they were kinsmen. I had marked the strange blood resemblance between them when I first saw the man, and it was doubly to be noted now. It was blood against blood as they faced each other. And it came to me that it was more than a personal duel. No wrong is so unforgivable as one from our own family whose secret weaknesses we know and share, and I felt that the repulsion in the woman's eyes was part for herself and part for her pride of race. Yet I was uncertain of the issue. The tie of blood is strong, and after

a few minutes I thought that Starling was gaining ground. His great personality enwrapped us all, and his strange, compelling voice went on and on and on, pleading, pleading in a tongue that I could not understand. His eyes never left the woman's, and in time hers fell. I tried to clench my bound hands, for my pride in her was hurt; yet I could understand his power.

It was just then that the savages wearied of the spectacle and hustled Starling away. They saw that he was English, and they unbound his arms, and began to take counsel concerning him. In a flash I saw my path clear. They were friendly to the English. The woman was English. I must not let her identify herself with me. And so when her glance crept back to me, I was prepared. I would not stop to read what her look might say. I shook my head at her and dropped my eyes. I made the same signal to Singing Arrow. The Indian would understand my motive; I could not be sure about the woman.

And then I turned and mingled with the crowd, with my heart beating strangely but my brain cool. The interest was centring in Starling, and the older men had their calumets in hand and were preparing for the council. I saw that for a few hours at least I should have life and semi-liberty. There was no possibility

of my escape, so, bound as I was, I was free to wander within limits. I would keep as near the women as possible and try and herd my faction together.

I had been too absorbed to use my eyes, but now I saw that a captive was lying near my feet. He was closely tied on two pieces of rough wood shaped like a St. Andrew's cross, and was a hideous sight with his tongue protruding and his eyes beginning to glaze. Dogs were scrambling and tearing at him, and I edged nearer and tried to drive them away. I examined him as closely as I dared, and judged by the dressing of his long hair that he was a Miami. In that case the war party must have come from the south by way of the Ohio and the Illinois country, and they were probably working their way north to reach Michillimackinac on its unguarded side. I saw it was a war party, for there were no women with them, and the Iroquois carry their families on all hunting trips.

I looked at the dying man and wished for my knife. So they tortured Indian captives while they let me, a Frenchman, go lightly bound. Well, my turn was yet to come. My white skin probably gave me importance enough so that I would be referred to the council. I would not look ahead. I would plan for the moment, and open eyes and ears.

There were many captives, I saw now, and my anxiety for Leclerc and Labarthe grew keen. I made my slow way around the bound figures. Some were pegged to the ground by their outstretched hands and feet, and some were stretched on crosses. But all were Indians. I saw more Miamis, a few Kickapoos, and some whom I did not know; I learned later that they were Mascoutens. And then I saw Labarthe. He was tied to a tree, Leclerc beside him. Leclerc, who was ever a fool, would have motioned to me, but Labarthe struck down his arm and gave a blank stare. So I was able to get near them. They looked blood-stained and jaded, but practically unhurt, and I saw a half-eaten chunk of meat in Leclerc's hand. They had been fed and reasonably well treated. But that meant nothing as guide to what might come.

I had not made my way alone. Starling was the chief attraction, but I, too, was the centre of a curious, chaffering crowd. The braves were unwontedly good-humored, childishly pleased with the evening's excitement, and I amused them still further by shrugging at them and making great faces of contempt. When one offered me a meal cake I kicked at him and trampled the food into the ground, and as I swaggered away I heard him tell the others that I was a bear for courage. I could have smiled at that,

for I was acting more like a blustering terrier than any nobler animal, but I would not let them see that I understood their tongue.

And so I pushed my way about. But wherever I went, or whatever else my eyes were doing, I kept watch upon the woman. She stood quiet with Singing Arrow and waited for what might come. Her fate was hanging with Starling's at the council ring, and I knew that I must keep away from her. That was not easy. Each time that I let my glance rest upon the foulness of the camp I felt that I must go to her and blind her eyes. But I never made more than one step. I had only to look at her to understand that her spirit had learned in these months to hold itself above the body. What was passing did not touch her; she lived in the fortress of her splendidly garrisoned pride. Singing Arrow stood equally aloof, intrenched in her stoicism, but I think the root motives of the two were different, though the outside index was the same. Indeed, we all had different wellsprings for our composure. Pierre's stolidity was largely training. Starling's quiet might mean instinctive imitation, but I feared it was something more sinister. While mine — But I had no composure. I swaggered and shrugged and played harlequin and boaster.

We were soon to learn that Starling's quiet

was not impervious. I saw him start. His hand flew to where his knife had been, and his teeth showed like a jackal's. A figure that had lain, blanket-shrouded in the shadow, had risen and come forward. It was Pemaou. He had pleased his humor by being an unseen auditor and letting us play out our various forms of resistance and despair for his delight. Now he would make a dramatic entry. He was dressed for the part in a loin cloth, a high laced hat of scarlet, and the boots of a captain of dragoons. He stopped before Starling and grinned silently. Then he held his hat, French fashion, and made a derisive bow. The Englishman forgot his dignity and cursed. I wished that I had been near enough to hold up a warning hand.

I knew my turn was next, so was prepared. Pemaou sought me, and stood before me, but I would not see him; I looked through him as through glass. He spoke to me in French, but I was deaf. I heard the Senecas grunt with amusement.

Pemaou heard it too, and his war plume quivered. He gave an order in Huron, and one of his men came behind me and unbound my hands. I could have jeered at the childishness of his open purpose. He hoped that, with my hands free, I would spring at him, impotent and vengeful as a caged rattlesnake, and that then he could

turn me over to the sport and torture of the mob. I stretched my freed arms, laughed to myself, and turned away. My laugh was genuine. It was wine to me that he should have shown weakness in this fashion, when in some ways he had proved himself a better general than I. It was a small victory, but it cheered me.

I do not know how long the council lasted, but it seemed hours. The old men rose at last, and going to Starling, patted him, grunted over him, and examined him. I could not hear what they said, but it was evidently pacific; they led him off in the direction of the largest lodge.

And then came the woman's turn. I knew that my face was strained, though I strove to keep it sneering. I saw the oldest man give instructions, then he went to the two women and pointed the way before him. I pushed along as best I could. He took them to a small hut of bark and motioned them within, while he himself dropped the mat in front of the opening. They were safe for that night at least.

The savages were wearied now and turned to Pierre and me with yawns. They made short work of us. I was bound to the arm of a stout warrior, and he dragged me under a tree and dropped on the ground. He was snoring before I had finished building a barricade of cloak between us to keep as much as possible of his touch and smell away.

The camp quieted rapidly, and I soon had only silence between me and the stars. My mind was active but curiously placid. Inch by inch I went over the ground of the last twenty-four hours. I stated the case to myself as a foreigner translates a lesson. It is sometimes a help to put a situation in the concrete, to phrase it as to a stranger. In that way you stand aloof and see new light. So I put the matter in category, sharing it with the stars, and with the back of the snoring Indian.

We were in Pemaou's hands. He had known that the Iroquois were coming; had probably known it months before, and had instigated this campaign. He wished an alliance with the English, and, though he could work to that end through the Iroquois, he would find an English prisoner a material aid. I could see how useful I had been to him in keeping the Englishwoman away from Michillimackinac, — where he would have had ado to hold his title of possession to her, — and I could not but respect the skill with which he had timed his blow, and brought her to the Iroquois camp at the right moment. Yes, I had served him well, from the time when I had assisted him to hear Longuant's speech in the Ottawa camp to the present hour. The accident that had strengthened him still further by throwing Lord Starling into his hands he also owed to

me. But I looked up at the stars and did not lose courage. The game was not over; the score was yet to be paid.

I had many plans to arrange. Day was coming, and I watched the horizon breaking and felt that the morning would bring new opportunity.

And then, just as I needed all my wit and presence, I fell into a deep, exhausted sleep.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PRICE OF SLEEP

I DO not know that, after all, I can call that sleep which fell upon me. Sleep is merely a blessed veiling of the faculties; this was collapse, deadness. The Indian beside me must have been equally worn, for he lay like a log. We were huddled close to a tree, so were unnoticed, or at least undisturbed. The sun was hours high when I opened my eyes.

I sprang to my feet, dragging the Indian to his knees. He grunted, rubbed his eyes, and feeling sluggish and uncomfortable from the warmth of the morning, found me an incubus. He grunted again, untied the thongs that bound us, and went, stretching and yawning, to find his breakfast.

I stood for a moment marshaling my wits. The bright day and the noise confused me, for I had been deep sunk in unconsciousness, and grasped the real world unsteadily. The camp was even larger than the night had shown, and it took some looking to find the woman's lodge. It was empty; the mat was pulled down from before the door.

I should have expected nothing else, for the

morning was far advanced, but I felt baffled, belated, like one whose long unconsciousness had carried him hopelessly out of touch with his surroundings. Most of the Indians were gathered at the shore, and I made my way toward them. I went but slowly, for I had to feign indifference. I knew that every step was watched. Perhaps the woman herself was watching. I burned with shame to think she should have seen me sleep so soddenly. I expected every moment to see her in the crowd.

But when I reached the beach the crowd was straying as if the excitement were over. Far out on the water to the northeast was a flotllia of canoes fast disappearing. Whom did they carry? Had they left from the camp? I cursed myself for my lost hours. The threads of the situation had slipped from my hand, and all my feeling of competence and hope of the night before had gone with them. I could see no sign of the woman nor of Starling. Pierre's red head was a beacon, but I dared not go to him. He was bending over a caldron of boiling meat, and I saw that my man was himself again, and that the trencher called him more winningly than any voice of mine. I shrugged, and went to the beach to make what toilet I could. The cold water recreated me. I was more a man when I strolled back in the crowd.

And then I saw Labarthe. He was unbound and mingling with the Indians. Leclerc was close beside him, shuffling and docile; he, too, was free, as was Pierre. Four of us, and our hands at liberty. This looked better. I hummed a tune, clapped a brave on the shoulder, and motioned him to bring me meat and meal. But where was the woman?

I saw Labarthe working toward me with his eyes the other way, so I knew he had news. He was nimbler witted than Pierre, though less valuable on a long stretch. I dreaded Leclerc, for he could not be trusted even for good sense, and I heartily wished him elsewhere. But Pierre came to the rescue; he called Leclerc boldly, and drew him to the meat caldron. I was satisfied. Three of us were working in unison, — and we had worked together in this way before, and won. But where were Pemaou, and Starling, and the woman?

Labarthe made his way near, and stood with his back toward me. I remembered a roundelay that we had sung in camp. I whistled it, picking, in the meantime, at the bone the Indian had brought. I whistled the tune once, twice, several times. Then I fitted words to it.

"Where is the woman? Where is the Englishman? Tell me." I sang the words boldly, but in bastard French with clipped accents. I feared

that among all these Senecas there might be one or more who had some smattering of the French tongue.

Labarthe did not answer at once nor look around, so I went on singing. Nonsense words now, with no coherence or meaning, and all in French that a cowherd would have been ashamed to own.

I worked at last to a crescendo of sound that gave Labarthe his cue. He turned and laughed, as if noticing me for the first time. He cocked his head like a game bird, planted his legs apart, and joined the song. He had the biggest voice from Montreal to Chambly, and he sung with full lung power and at breathless speed. It was a torrent of sound; my ears were strained to follow it.

"Five large canoes left this morning," he warbled. "They carried madame, the Englishman, Pemaou, and his Hurons, and a detachment of the Senecas, — some seventy-five in all. They went to Michillimackinac."

The news hit me like a bullet, and I must have whitened, but I kept on singing. I nodded at Labarthe, and sang, I think, of spring and running brooks. Then I flung a jeer at him and ate my breakfast. I ate it systematically and stolidly, though it would not have tempted any but a starving man. I was a fool and a dull-

ard. I had slept away my opportunities, and I could not see that my strength was important to any one. But I determined to preserve it.

If I kept up jest and laughter for the next hours — and I have some memory that I did — it was automatic. For I more nearly touched despair than ever before. I did not need the sentences that I picked up further among the Indians to tell me what had happened. The Senecas, under Pemaou's guidance, had gone to Michillimackinac; had put their heads into the bear's mouth, and yet were as safe as in their own village, for the bear's teeth were drawn, and the Senecas were armored. They traveled with Pemaou, and they had two English prisoners. That insured them protection from the Hurons, who desired the English alliance and had leanings toward the Iroquois. As to the Ottawas, — there was Singing Arrow as hostage. It was significant that the Senecas had allowed Singing Arrow to go unbound. They desired an alliance with the Ottawas. I remembered Longuant's speech, and his indicated policy of casting his strength with the winning side, and I thought it probable they would succeed.

And if they succeeded? Well, Cadillac had his two hundred regulars. Yet he could not hope to win, and he would do what he could to hold off the necessity of trying. He would not

dare seize the Senecas. No, the league of the Long House had won. Their braves could sit in our garrison at their leisure and exchange peace belts with our Indians under our eyes. I set my teeth and wondered what part Starling had played in it all. He had grown curiously at ease when he had found himself in an Iroquois camp. I had no choice but to believe that Pemaou had tricked and deceived him, as he had said, but that did not mean that he had not been in league with Pemaou in the beginning. Pemaou was capable of tricking a confederate. No Englishman understands an Indian, and if he had patronized Pemaou the Huron would have retaliated in just this way. I grew sick with the maze of my thought. But one thing I grasped. With part of the Senecas in the French camp, we Frenchmen would be spared for a time. We would be convenient for exchange, or to exact terms of compromise. They might torture us, but they would keep us alive till the issue of this expedition was known.

All about me were preparations for a permanent camp. This puzzled me for a time, but I soon worked out the reason. They were afraid to march with their full force on Michillimackinac, for they feared the friendship of the western tribes for the French, and thought that if a large war party marched openly toward the garrison

these tribes would rally to Cadillac's defense. So this camp was kept as watch-dog for the western region. I prayed that Cadillac keep his judgment cool.

One thing brought smiles that I had to turn into vacant and misleading laughter. Through all the talk ran my name, — that they did not know was mine. They had heard that I was stirring among the western tribes, and that I was making them dangerous. They spoke of my knowledge of Indian tongues, and added apocryphal tales of my feats of wit and daring. My image loomed large, and it was no wonder that they did not connect this mythical Colossus with the swaggering royster who played buffoon for their mirth. I wondered that Pemaou had not told them, but I reflected that there is a mutual distrust among Indians that takes the place of reticence, and that that had saved me. I had escaped for the moment, but the ice was thin. I should be given short shrift once my name was known.

The day passed, warm and lovely in the woods and on the water, hideous and sweltering in the stench of the camp. I saw captives die of heat and flies, but I could do nothing. My men took cue from me, and we all laughed and chaffered. I even took a turn at spear throwing, but was too discreet to win. I gained some good-will, per-

haps, but nothing more, and when the stars came out that night I ground my teeth to think of how little I had accomplished, and of the slender opportunity ahead.

But the next morning I saw a straw to grasp. Up to that time we had been left to the guardianship of all the camp, but the second day I saw that the huge brave to whom I was tied at night followed me incessantly. I watched, and saw that my men had similar attendants. This was a gain, as I said to Labarthe. I did not try to have connected speech with the men, but by saying a word at a time as we passed we could patch together a few sentences.

From that on I gave the day to winning my special jailer. He was an intelligent Indian and inclined to be good-humored. I amused him, and when I took a net and motioned that we go to the swamp to fish he grunted and agreed.

The swamp lay on the north of the camp, and was, I was sure, part of the great rice field on which the Malhominis had their village to the west. The swamp was flooded so that it would bear a canoe, and it teemed with fish. I took the net, — it was ingeniously woven of nettles pounded to a fibre and then spun into cords, — and showed the Indian how to swing it across an eddy and draw it under with a swift, circular sweep that would entangle any fish. I had suc-

cess, and the Indian warmed to the sport and tried it himself. He could not do it; he could not get the twist of the hand that was the whole secret, and I had to show him again. He improved and grew ambitious. A few braves wandered over to look at us, but my jailer was jealous of his new accomplishment, and we took a canoe and paddled out of sight. We spent most of the day in the swamp.

That evening I went boldly to Pierre and said a few swift words. I told him to keep as near the swamp as possible, and to tell the other men to do the same. In about two days, if my plans carried, we should be able to accomplish something. In the meantime they must appear contented, and try for the confidence of their guards.

Now my plan was simple. I had in my shirt the bottle of laudanum that all traders carry, and it was my only weapon. Pierre had shown me a small flask of rum which the Indians had not discovered, and which he had had the unexpected self-control to leave untouched. I hoped that when my Indian had learned the casting of his net his vanity could be played on to invite the other Frenchmen and their guards to see his prowess, and that we should then have opportunity to treat the Indians to the laudanum-dosed rum. It was a crazy scheme, but worth a trial. If we could get possession of the canoe, there

was some hope that we could make our way to the Malhominis village.

No teacher was ever more zealous than I for my net-thrower. Early the next morning I winked toward the swamp, and jerked my thumb over my shoulder. The Indian came willingly. Why should he not? I was unarmed, and he had knife and hatchet and was my peer in strength. He thought me a strange fool, but useful.

But that morning the lesson went badly. The Indian was clumsy, and being ashamed of himself, grew surly and indifferent. The sun was hot, the water dazzling, and mosquitoes rose in clouds. The Indian wanted to go back to camp, and I cudgeled my wits for expedients to keep him there.

And then I bethought me of an accomplishment which I had shown Indians before. Quickness of hand is my greatest resource, and I had been known to noose a fish. I tore my handkerchief in ribands, made a weighted sling, and had the Indian swing the canoe over a ripple where a great bass lay. I waited my time, then plunged my hand down with the weighted noose. I drew it up, with the fish caught through the gills.

The Indian was pleased. He grunted and exclaimed in his own speech, though he thought I could not understand.

"They say the Frenchman, Montlivet, can do that." Then he looked at me and light dawned. "You are Montlivet!"

I wasted no time. I do not know how I did it, but I sprang the length of the canoe and was on him before he could reach his knife. The canoe rocked, but righted itself. I knotted my fingers in the Indian's throat, and my body pinioned his arms.

The surprise of my attack gave me a second's vantage, and in it I snatched at the vial in my shirt, and drew the stopper with my teeth. It was difficult, for the great, naked frame was writhing under me, and the canoe pitched like a cork in an eddy. I felt the Indian's hot breath, and his teeth snapping to reach me. His arm was working free and his knife unsheathed. I threw my whole weight on his chest, released my clutch on his neck, and taking both hands, forced his mouth open and dashed the contents of my laudanum vial down his throat. Then I sprang into the water, dragging Indian and canoe after me.

I felt the slash of a knife in my right shoulder as I touched the water, and the Indian's wiry grasp on my coat. I rolled and grappled with him, and the canoe floated away. Hugging each other like twining water snakes, we sank down through the reeds to the slimy ooze of the bottom.

Down there we wrestled for a second, blinded and choking. Then self-love conquered hate, and we kicked ourselves free and spluttered to the surface. My shoulder was stinging, and I could not tell how long I could depend on it. I made a desperate stroke or two, dived, and put myself in the cover of the reeds.

The Indian splashed after me, but the water flowed through the reeds in a dozen channels, and he took the wrong one. He would find his mistake in a moment. I swam a few paces under water, then lay quiet, holding myself up by the reeds, and keeping my mouth to the air. Piece by piece I freed myself of my clothing and let it drop. The cut in my shoulder was raw and made me faint. It was not dangerous, but deep enough to give me trouble, and would make my swimming slow, if, indeed, I could swim at all. I felt the water swash against me and knew the Indian was swimming back. There was only a thin wall of reeds between us, and in a moment he would come to where the channels joined and see my floating garments. I could not stop to secure them, though I had hoped to tie them in a bundle on my back. I dropped under the water and swam away.

I have often marveled how I distanced that Indian so easily. It may have been his discomfort from the opiate, though I have never known

how much of what I splashed over him went into his mouth, nor what effect it had. But after a little I heard no sound of pursuit. I thought that perhaps the Indian had gone back to spread the alarm, and I took no risks. I swam as fast as I had strength, resting occasionally by holding on to the reeds, and trying to keep my course due northwest.

And hour by hour passed, and still I kept on swimming. It was torture after the first. I could rest as often as I needed, but the cold water palsied me, and I feared cramp. My shoulder was feverish, and the pain of it sapped my strength. Occasionally I found a log tangled in the reeds, and I pulled myself up on it into the sun. If I had not been able to do that I could not have gone on.

With chill and fever and pain I had light-headed intervals. These came as the afternoon waned, and while they lasted I thought that the woman was in the Seneca camp, and that I must get back to her. Then I would turn and swim with the current, losing in a few minutes as much as I had gained in double the time. Fortunately these seizures were brief, but they would leave me sick and shaken and grasping the reeds for support. Another illusion came at this time: I would hear the woman calling, calling my name. Sometimes she cried that I had forsaken her. That left me weaker than the fever of my wound.

It was impossible to see where I was going, for the reeds were high above my head, but so long as my reason lasted I steered by the sun. I presume that I doubled many times, and lost much space, but that I do not know, for toward the end I traveled like an automaton. I could not fix my mind on where I was going or why, but I kept repeating to myself that I must push against the current, and so, though I lost the idea at times, and found myself drifting, I think that I went some distance after my brain had ceased to direct.

And then I found peace. My mind, freed of the burden of thinking of its surroundings, turned to the woman. She called to me, talked to me, sometimes she walked the reeds at my side. She was all smiles and lightness, and her tongue had never a barb. I forgot to struggle. The narrow channel where I had been fighting my way opened now into a broader passage, and the current flowed under me like an uplifting hand. The woman's voice called me from down-stream; I turned on my back, and floated, dreamy and expectant, toward the river's mouth.

CHAPTER XXIII

I ENCOUNTER MIXED MOTIVES

I WAS called to semi-consciousness by the tinkling clamor of small bells, and by feeling my feet caught in something clinging yet yielding. Then my body swung into it. It was a web. I pulled at it, and tried to brush it away. And all the while the bells kept ringing, ringing. A shower of arrows fell around me, and one grazed my foot.

A man must be far gone indeed when an arrow point will not sting him to life. I was no longer a fever-riven log of driftwood. I knew where I was and what was happening. I had reached the Malhominis village. Working through the rice swamp, I had come into the main river too far to the west, but following the woman's voice I had floated back. I was caught in one of the nets that the Malhominis strung with small bells, and stretched across the stream to keep both fish and enemies in bounds. I set my teeth hard.

"It is Montlivet. It is Montlivet," I called.

Had I thought the Malhominis stolid and none too intelligent! They heard me call, they pushed a canoe to my rescue, and they carried

me to a warm lodge. I remember that I bandied words with them as they carried me. They made sport to see me naked, for on my former visit I had rebuked them severely on that score. But they were tender of my shoulder.

The time for the next few hours — indeed for the night — is confused. My shoulder was dressed and bound with herbs, and I was laid on a bed of rushes. Outchipouac, the Malhominis war chief, knew from former acquaintance with me that I had prejudices and would not lie where it was not clean, and so he humored me and gave orders that the rushes be freshly cut. By this I knew that he had not only respect for me, but something that was like affection, since savages are indolent and intolerant, and will not bestir themselves for Europeans unless they are unwontedly interested. I treasured this kindness. One meets little that savors of personal regard in the wilderness, and I was ill.

Now, savages know little of the laws of health and abuse what they know, but in the matter of herbs they can be trusted. The herb drink which they gave me had virtue, for I woke with my head clear. A gourd of water stood beside my pallet, and I drained it and called lustily for another. A man pushed aside the skins and came in. It was Pierre. Pierre, alive, clothed, and with every hair of his flamingo head bristling

and unharmed! He answered my cry with a huge smile, and then because he had a gypsy mother in the background of his nature, he put his great hands before his face, and I saw tears pushing between the fingers.

That made me fear ill news. I half rose, and would have shaken his tidings out of him like corn out of a bag. But the pain of my shoulder sent me back again with my teeth jammed hard together.

"What has happened? Out with it!" I cried.

But Pierre was inarticulate. He came to my pallet and mumbled something between tears about my shoulder.

—"and the master with no clothes but a dirty Indian's!" he finished.

So I was the cause of this demonstration. I patted his hand.

"But your escape, Pierre? Where are the other men?"

"Master, I do not know."

"But where did you come from? How did you get here? Talk, man!"

"The master does not give me time. I came by land. It is a fine land. They raise great squashes. Yes, and grain and vegetables! I have never seen their like in France. If I had a farm here I could have more than I could eat the whole year round."

I took time to curse. I had never heard my giant prate of agriculture; the camp and the taproom had been his haunts. This appeared to be a method of working toward ill news. I lay back on my rushes and tried to fix his eye.

"Pierre, answer. Where is Labarthe?"

"I told the master" —

"Answer!"

"I don't know."

"Did he escape with you?"

Pierre rubbed his sleeve across his face. "The master will not listen. I do not know about Labarthe. I saw him at camp yesterday morning. The master saw him at the same time. Then the master went to the swamp, and I went, too, with my Indian. But I kept behind. By and by I saw the canoe upside down, and the master's cloak floating on the water; by that I knew that the master was drowned or had got away. I thought he had gone to the Malhominis, and I wanted to go, too. So I killed my Indian, and hid him in the grass. I came by land."

I rose on my elbow, careless of my shoulder. "How could you kill the Indian? You had no weapon."

Pierre stretched out his arms, knotted like an oak's branches, and illustrated. "I hugged him. Once I broke the ribs of a bear."

I lay and wagged my head like an old man who hears of warlocks and witch charms, and knows the tales to be true. The stupefying simplicity of it! If you want a thing, take it. Pierre wanted to follow me, so he killed his guard and came. That was all there was of it. I looked at him long, my head still wagging. He had done this sort of thing before. I had never understood it. It was this that I meant when I had called Pierre, dull of wit as he seemed, the most useful of my men.

I lay all day on my pallet, and Outchipouac served me with his own hands.

"It is thus that we treat those whom we delight to honor," he said, and he held the gourd to my lips and wiped my face with a square of linen that some trader had left in camp. He would give me no solid food, but dosed me with brewed herbs and great draughts of steaming broth. The juggler looked into the lodge and would have tried his charms on me, but Outchipouac sent him away.

A storm rose toward night, and I heard the knocking of the rain on the skin roof above me, and thought of the woman traveling northward in the Iroquois canoes. Starling was with her. I lay with tight-clenched hands.

The storm swelled high. I asked that the mat be dropped from before the door that I might see

the lightning, and while I watched it Outchipouac slipped in. He felt me over, and patted my moist skin approvingly. Then he sat by my side and began to talk.

His talk at first was a chant, a saga, a recitation of the glories of his ancestors. The Malhominis had been a proud race, — now they were dwindled to this village of eighty braves. He crooned long tales of famine, of tribal bickerings, of ambuscade and defeat; his voice rustled monotonously like wind in dried grass.

Then his tone rose. He spoke of the present, its possibilities. The Iroquois league was a scourge, a pestilence. Could it be abolished, the western nations would return to health. Security would reign, and tribal laws be respected. The French would be friends, partners, — never masters, — and a golden age would descend upon the west. It was the gospel that I had cried in the wilderness, but phrased in finer imagery than mine. I felt the wooing of his argument, even as I had wooed others, and I listened silently and watched the lightning's play.

But I dreaded the moment when his argument should leave theory and face me in the concrete. The change came suddenly, as in music a tender melody will merge abruptly into a summons to arms. He called me to witness. The Iroquois

were at the gates. They outnumbered the Malhominis, but the Sacs, the Chippewas, and the Winnebagoes were all within a day's journey, and would come at my call. The time for the alliance of which I had told them was at hand. My body was crippled but my brain was whole. To-morrow he, the chief, at my bidding, and with my watchword, would send runners through the tribes. Within the week a giant force could be gathered and an attack made. The Iroquois camp would be exterminated, and then I, at the head of the force, could march where I willed. Never had the western tribes followed a white man, but I had called their hearts from their bodies, and they would go.

But one thing I was to remember. He, Outchipouac, the chief, was my brother in arms. He had rescued me, clothed me, furnished me the means of war. My victories were his victories. These were his conditions. All Iroquois slaves that might be captured were to belong to the Malhominis to be incorporated in their tribe. The other tribes could divide the plunder, but the Malhominis needed new blood for adoption. I must agree to that.

He stopped. I was too sick of mind to speak, and my distemper was not of my wound. I had builded for this moment for two years, and now that it had come I was going to turn my back on

it. More, I was going to refuse aid to a man who had succored me, had shown me genuine kindness. Self-pity is contemptible, but I felt it now.

"I cannot lead you," I said dully. "Gather your troops if you like, and make the attack without me. I cannot be here. To-morrow I must start for Michillimackinac. You will give me a canoe and a man?"

The lightning filled the tent and lit our faces, and I saw the chief start back under the blow of my words. He was shocked out of all his inherited and acquired phlegm. He did not speak, but he rose and peered into my eyes and I saw bewilderment go and contempt rise to take its place. To feel the righteous disdain of an Indian! That is an unusual experience for a white man.

And still he did not reply. He sat down and pulled his blanket over him. He was sorting out the evidence against me and giving judgment. It seemed at least an hour that he sat silent. And when he did speak he brought no manna.

"You have sold yourself to the Iroquois wolf. You are a child. You see only what is in front of your nose and forget what may come later. You are a fox. You hand us over to the wolf, but what do you expect? Has a wolf gratitude? No, but he has hunger. Fox meat is poor and

stringy, but the wolf has a large stomach. Let the fox beware."

I pulled myself to my feet, though my shoulder cried to me for mercy. I jerked the chief's blanket aside.

"Outchipouac, I have listened. You have used an old trick. When a man wishes to be rid of a dog he cries that it is mad; then he can kill it, and no one will call him to account. So you. If you wish to break the covenant between us, now is your time. You can call me a fox, you can say that I have sold my honor to the Iroquois wolf. No one will check you, for I am naked and ill, and you are powerful. But you will have lied. This is my answer. I have called you 'brother;' I have kept the bond unbroken. If there is a fox here it is the man who calls me one."

I waited, and my mind was heavy. If the chief called me "brother" in turn, I was ready to embrace him as of my kin. For he was full of vigor of mind and honesty, and I respected him. He had been kind to me. Would he trust me against the evidence, — the evidence of his ears and of my reluctant tongue?

He temporized. "The Frenchman has a tongue like a bobolink, — pleasant to hear. Whether it says much, — that is a different matter. Can the Frenchman tell me why he

wishes to go to Michillimackinac? Can he tell me why he spends time from the moon of breaking ice to the moon of strawberries building a lodge of promises, and then when he is just ready to use the lodge blows it down with a breath?"

What could I tell him? That I was following a woman? That I had given her my name, and that I must protect her? It would sound to him like a parrot's laughter. This was no court of love. It was war. A troubadour's lute would tinkle emptily in these woods that had seen massacre and knew the shriek of the death cry. Again I set my teeth and rose.

"Outchipouac, war is secret. I cannot tell you why I go to Michillimackinac. But trust me. I go on business; I shall return at once, within ten days, unless the wind be foul. Will you furnish me a canoe and a man to paddle?" I stooped and pulled rushes from my pallet, plaited them, and bound them in a ring. "Take this ring; keep it. It is firm, like my purpose, and unending, like my endeavor. I shall replace it with a chain of bright silver when I come to you again. I give it to you in pledge of my friendship."

The chief took the ring and handled it loosely. I thought he was about to throw it away, but he did not. He put it in his blanket.

"It is well," he said, and left the lodge. I was held on probation.

I had a good night and woke with new sinews. I saw that the sun was shining and the sky untroubled. A squaw brought me broth, and I drank it hungrily and tried to see no evil augury in the fact that I was served by a woman. I flattered her, and asked her to summon Pierre.

She brought him at once. He thrust himself into the entrance, and I saw dismay written large upon him.

"There is a canoe waiting to take the master away," he cried. "I am going, too."

Now I was prepared for this battle. "Pierre, you are to stay here. You are to keep near the Seneca camp to help Labarthe and Leclerc. If they escape, go, all of you, to our camp on Sturgeon Cove and guard the stores till I send you word. You understand?"

"But the master is sick. I go with him."

"You stay here."

"I go with the master."

"I will not allow it."

"Then I follow behind."

"You have no canoe, no provision."

"I have legs. I can walk. I can eat tripe de roche."

The giant was trembling. I could not but respect this rebellion. He had broken the chains

of three centuries in his defiance. The thought of his filling his cavernous stomach with tripe de roche — which is a rock lichen, slimy and tasteless — moved me somewhat.

"You dare disobey me, Pierre?"

"But the master is sick."

I shrugged, but the logic held. "Then tell the chief," I capitulated. "And see that I have something to wear."

Water was brought by one squaw, and another fetched more broth and bound my shoulder with fresh dressings. Then leggings, robe, and girdle of wolfskin were left for me. I put them on with difficulty, and went to find Outchipouac.

I stepped out into a glare of sunshine and stood blinking. The braves were gathered in a group, and a line of squaws barred me from them. I started toward them, but the squaws waved me back; they pointed me to the shore and the waiting canoe. Pierre rolled forward, uneasy and scowling.

"The braves will not speak to us; they say our talk means nothing."

"Who said that?"

"Outchipouac. He showed me a grass ring hanging on a pole by his lodge. He says that when you come again and hang a silver one in its place it will be time for him to listen."

I knew the Indians were watching, though covertly, so I could only bow. I went to the

canoe and looked to its provisioning. There were two bags of rice, one of jerked meat, some ears of maize, and the dried rind of a squash; a knife and a hatchet lay with them. Our hosts had been generous. We were to be aided even if we were to be disciplined. I found my place, and Pierre took the paddle and pushed away.

It is one thing to be at enmity with savages, it is another to be an outcast among them. I knew that their attitude had excuse, and I was sick with myself. Then my Indian dress chafed my pride. I was sure that Pierre was laughing under his wrinkled red skin, and I was childish enough to be ready to rate him if he showed so much as a pucker of an eye. For I had always refused to let my men adopt the slightest particular of the savage dress. I had held — and I contend rightly — that a man must resist the wilderness most when he loves it most, and that he is in danger when he forgets the least point of his dress or manner. After that the downward plunge is swift. I had said this many times, and I knew Pierre must be recalling it.

And so I was sore with fate. Wounded, skin-clad, I was not heroic in look; it was hard to be heroic in mind. I had jeopardized the chance of an empire for a woman. But that proved nothing. The weakest could do that. It must be shown that I could justify my sacrifice.

These were irritations, yet they were but the surface of my suffering. Underneath was the grinding, never-ceasing ache of anxiety. What was happening at Michillimackinac? Would I reach there in time? I could do nothing but sit and think. Always, from dawn to dusk, my impatient spirit fretted and pushed at that canoe, but my hands were idle. I tried paddling with my left hand, but it dislocated my bandages, and I did not dare. I was in some pain, but exposed as I was, broiled by the sun and drenched by showers, I yet mended daily. I ate well and drank deep of the cold lake water and felt my strength come. My cut was healing wholesomely without fever, and Pierre washed and bandaged it twice a day. He told me with many a twist of his hanging lip that it was well for me that he was there.

But on the point of his being there I had new light. It came one day after long silence. The giant rested and wiped his forehead.

"There are plovers on the waters," he pointed. "They make good eating. Singing Arrow can cook them with bear's grease. I am going to marry the Indian when we get to Michillimackinac. Then when we reach Montreal you will give her a dowry. There is the grain field on the lower river that was planted by Martin. Martin has no wife. What does he need of grain? The

king wishes his subjects to marry. And if the master gave us a house we could live, oh, very well. I thought of it when I went through the Malhominis land and saw all those squashes. The Indian sews her own dresses, and I shall tell her I do not like her in finery. We will send a capon to the master every Christmas."

I grinned despite myself. I had grown fatuous, for I had taken it without question that the oaf had followed from his loyalty to me. But I nodded at him and promised recklessly — house, pigs, and granary. The same star ruled master and man.

But the way was long, long, long. Nights came and days came, and still more nights and days. Yet it ended at last. Late one afternoon we saw the shore line that marked Michillimackinac. Once in sight it came fast, fast, fast, — faster than I could prepare my courage for what might meet me. What should I find?

We reached the beach where I had tied Father Carheil. We rounded the point. The garrison, the board roofs of the Jesuit houses, the Indian camps, — all were as usual. They were peaceful, untouched. I swallowed, for my throat and tongue were dry.

CHAPTER XXIV

I MEET VARIOUS WELCOMES

It was Father Carheil who first sighted us. He sounded the cry of our arrival, and came skurrying like a sandpiper, his scant gown tripping him, his cap askew.

I leaped from the canoe and hurried to him. The man must hate me, but he could not refuse me news. I stretched out my hand.

"Is all well here, father? Is all well?"

He disdained my hand, and held his arms wide. "All is well with us. But you — We feared the Iroquois wolf had devoured you."

And I had thought the man capable of petty spite. I dropped on my knees to him. "Father Carheil, I grieve for what I did, yet I could not have done otherwise."

He drew back a little and rumpled his thin hair with a bloodless hand. His face was frowning, but his restless, brilliant eyes were full of amusement.

"So your conscience is not at ease? My son, you are as strong as a Flemish work horse. I limped to mass for the next fortnight, and my gown was in fiddle-strings, — you may send me

another. As for the rest, we need new altar hangings. Now, come, come, come. Tell us what has happened."

And there it ended. One makes enemies in strange ways in this world and friends in stranger. I should not have said that the way to win a man's heart was to bind him like a Christmas fowl and then leave him with his back on the sand.

The priest's cry had waked the garrison, and the officers came running. Cadillac, stout as he was, was in the lead. I knew, from the press of his arms about me, that he had thought me dead.

"Is Madame de Montlivet safe? Are the Senecas here?" I clamored at him.

A babel of affirmatives arose. Yes, madame was there. The Senecas were there. So the English prisoner had proved to be a woman. Had I known it at the time? I was a sly dog. All tongues talked at once, while I fought for a hearing. We turned toward the commandant's. The door of the nearest cabin opened and Starling came out. He did not look toward us, and he walked the other way. The woman walked beside him.

A hush clapped down on us as if our very breathing were strangled. A lane opened in front of me. I took one step in it, then stopped. There was the woman. I had followed her

through wounds and hardship. Through the long nights I had watched the stars and planned for our meeting. But when I would have gone to her my feet were manacled, for this was not the woman of my dreams. This woman wore trailing silk, and her hair was coifed. And she was walking away from me; no instinct told her that I was near. She was walking away, and Starling walked beside her. I did not remember that I was wounded and a sorry figure; I did not remember that I was dressed in skins. I remembered that I had married this woman by force, and that she had once wished of her own accord to marry Starling. And now she walked with him; she wore a gown he must have brought; she had forgiven him. A hot spark ran from my heart to my brain. I turned and started toward the beach.

I heard a breath from the throats around me and a stretching of cramped limbs. Cadillac's arm dropped round my shoulders, and I felt the pressure of his fingers.

"Come to my quarters," he said. "You have mail waiting. And we will find you something to wear. Dubisson is near your size."

And so I let him lead me away. I pressed him for news of the Indian situation, but he only shrugged and said, "Wait. Matters are quiescent enough on the surface. We will talk later."

It was strange. I bathed and dressed quite as I had done many times before, when I had come in from months in camp; quite as if there were no woman, and as if massacre were not knocking at the window. But I carried a black weight that made my tongue leaden, and I excused myself from table on the plea of going through my mail.

The news the letters brought was good but unimportant. In the Montreal packet was a sealed line in a woman's hand.

"I have tracked my miniature," it read. "I mourned its disappearance; I should welcome its return. Can you find excuses for the man who took it from me? If you can, I beg that you let me hear them. He was once my friend, and I am loath to think of him hardly." The note bore no signature. It was dated at the governor's house at Montreal, and directed to me at Michillimackinac.

I was alone with Dubisson and I turned to him. "Madame Bertheau is at Montreal?"

He shrugged. "So I hear."

"She has come to see her brother?"

Now he grinned. "Ostensibly, monsieur."

There was no need to hide my feeling from Dubisson, so I sat with my chin sunk low and thought it over. I was ill pleased. I had been long and openly in Madame Bertheau's train, and this was a land of gossips. I turned to the lieutenant.

"Madame de Montlivet, where is she housed?"

He looked relieved. "She has a room next door. Starling we have taken in with us. I would rather have a tethered elk. He is so big he fills the whole place."

Now, square issues please me. "Dubisson, why has no one offered to take me to my wife?"

The man laughed rather helplessly. "'T is from no lack of respect for either of you, monsieur. But you said nothing, and Starling" —

"Yes, it is from Starling that I wish to hear."

"Well, Starling has said — Monsieur, why repeat the man's gossip?"

"Go on, Dubisson."

"After all, it is only what the Englishman has said. Madame, so far as I know, has said nothing. But Starling has told us that yours was a marriage of form only, — that the woman consented under stress, and now" —

"And now regretted it?"

"I am only quoting Starling. Monsieur, would you like to see your wife?"

I rose. "Yes. Will you send word and see if I may?"

Dubisson bowed and left me with a speed that gave me a wry smile. The laughter-loving lieutenant hated embarrassment as he did fast-days, and I had given him a bad hour.

He was back before I thought it possible.

"She will see you at once in the commandant's waiting-room." He looked at me oddly. "Your wife is a queenly woman, monsieur."

The lights shone uncertainly in the commandant's waiting-room. It was the room where I had met the English captive. From a defiant boy to a court lady! It was a long road, and I was conscious of all the steps that had gone to make it. I went to the woman in silk who waited by the door. She stood erect and silent, but her eyes shone softly through a haze, and when I bent to kiss her hand I found that she was quivering from feet to hair.

"Monsieur!" she whispered unsteadily, "monsieur!" Then I felt her light touch. "God is good. I have prayed for your safety night and day. Ah — but your shoulder! They did not tell me. Are you wounded, monsieur?"

I was cold as a clod. She had forgiven Starling. She had walked with him. I answered the usual thing mechanically. "My shoulder, — it is a scratch, madame." I kept my lips on her hand, and with the feeling her touch brought me I could not contain my bitterness. "Madame, you wear rich raiment. Does that mean that you and Lord Starling are again friends?"

She drew away. "Monsieur, should we not be friends?"

"Have you forgiven Lord Starling, madame?"

She looked at me with wistful quiet. In her strange gown she seemed saddened, matured. And she answered me gravely. "Monsieur, please understand. My cousin and I — Why, we traveled side by side in the Iroquois canoes. He served me, was careful of me; he — he has suffered for me, monsieur. I was hard to him for a long time, — a longer time than I like to remember. But I could not but listen to his explanation. And, whatever he did, he is, after all, my cousin, and he regrets deeply all that happened. As to this gown, — it is one I wore in Boston. My cousin brought it in his canoe and left it here at the garrison when he went west. Monsieur" —

"Yes, madame."

"Monsieur, I was wrong when I suspected my cousin. I have an unkind nature in many ways. He came here to find me, — for that alone. He honors you greatly for all you have done for me. I hope that you will give him opportunity to thank you as he wishes."

I thought of Starling's great voice, his air of power. "I hope to meet your cousin," I replied.

It was a churlish return, and she had been gentle. The chill that fell between us was of my making. I knew that with every second of silence I was putting myself more deeply in the wrong. But I had to ask one thing more.

"Madame, they tell me here that you say that you regret our marriage, — that I forced you to bear my name. Have you said that?"

I could not be blind to the hurt in her face. "Monsieur, how can you ask?"

And then I was shamed. I knelt again to her hand. "Only to prove in open words that Lord Starling lied. Did you think I doubted? No, madame, no woman of our house has ever had finer pride or a truer instinct. Believe me, I see that. But so the story flies. Madame, all eyes are on us. We must define the situation in some manner as regards the world. May I talk to you of this?"

The hand under my lips grew warm. "Monsieur, we are to wait. When we reach Montreal" —

"But, madame! These intervening months! It will be late autumn before we return to Montreal."

She drew in her breath. "Late autumn! Monsieur, what are your plans? You forget that I know nothing. And tell me of your escape."

I rose and looked down at her. "We have both escaped," I said, and because emotion was smiting me my voice was hard. "Let us not talk of it. I see that you are here, and I thank God. But I cannot yet bring myself to ask

what you have been through. I cannot face the horror of it for you. I beg you to understand."

But it was I who did not understand when she drew away. "As you will," she agreed, and there was pride in her great eyes, but there was a wound as well. "Yet why," she went on, "should a knowledge of human tragedy harden a woman? It strengthens a man. But enough. Monsieur, have you heard — the lady of the miniature is at Montreal?"

I was slow, for I was wondering how I had vexed her. "You never saw the miniature," I parried. "How can you connect a name with it, madame?"

She looked at me calmly. I hated her silk gown that shone like a breastplate between us. She brushed away my evasion.

"It is well known that you carried Madame Bertheau's miniature. You were an ardent suitor, monsieur."

Yes, I had been an ardent suitor. I remembered it with amaze. My tongue had not been clogged and middle-aged, in those blithe days, and yet those days were only two years gone. With this woman even Pierre had better speech at his command.

"Madame, who told you this?"

"Monsieur, the tale is common property in Paris."

"May I ask who told you, madame?"

"My cousin, monsieur."

"I thought so."

She looked at me fairly, almost sadly, as if she begged to read my mind. "Monsieur, why should you regret my knowing? It is to your credit that you admire Madame Bertheau. They tell me that she is a woman formed for love, beautiful, childlike, untouched by knowledge of crime or hardship. Monsieur, forgive me. Are you willing — May I see the miniature?"

The transition in my thought was so abrupt that I clapped my hand to my pocket as if it were still there.

"It — I am not carrying the miniature."

"Did — did the Indians take it from you?"

I stepped nearer. "Madame de Montlivet, what right have I to be carrying another woman's miniature? I shall write the fact of my marriage to Madame Bertheau, and the matter will be closed. No, the Indians did not take the miniature. I buried it in the woods."

"Monsieur, that was not necessary!"

"I thought that it was, madame."

She stood with a chair between us. "Monsieur," she said, with her eyes down, "I wish that I had known. It was not necessary. Did you bury the miniature when you married me?"

I put the chair aside and stood over her. "No, madame, I did not bury the miniature the day we were married. Do you remember the night of the storm, the night when you asked me if I could save you from your cousin? I rose early the next morning and digged a grave for the picture. It is buried deep, — with all that I once thought that it implied. If I confess now that it implied little you must find excuses for me. I — my heart was in the camp in those days. The rest was pastime. I have left pastimes behind, madame."

She would not look at me, yet I felt her change. The flitting, indescribable air of elation that marked her from all women in the world came back. She was again the woman of the forest, the woman who had waked with a song and looked with unhurried pulse into the face of danger. I breathed hard and bent to her, but she kept her eyes away.

"The fair little French face," she murmured. "You should not have put it in the cold earth. You were needlessly cruel, monsieur."

I bent lower. "I was not cruel. I gave her a giant sepulchre. That is over. But I — I shall have another miniature. I know a skilled man in Paris. Some time — some time I mean to have your portrait in your Indian blouse; in your skin blouse with the sun in your hair." My free hand

suddenly crept to her shoulder. "May I have it? May I have it, madame?"

I cannot remember. Often as I have tried, I can never quite remember. I am not sure that I heard her whisper. But I think that I did. She quivered under my touch, but she did not draw away, and so we stood for a moment, while my hand wandered where it had gone in dreams and rested on her hair. "Mary!" I whispered, and once more we let the silence lie like a pledge between us.

But in the moment of silence I heard again what I had forgotten, — the roar of the camp outside. It seemed louder than it had been, and it claimed my thought. I checked my breath to listen, holding the woman's hand in mine. And while we listened, Cadillac's loud step and cheerful voice came down the passage. The woman drew her hand away, and I let her go. I let her go as if I were ashamed. I have cursed myself for that ever since.

Cadillac stopped. "Are you there, Montlivet?" he called. "When you are at leisure, come to my room." I heard his step retreat.

And then I turned to the woman. But with Cadillac's voice a change had come. My mind was again heavy with anxiety. I remembered the thronging Indians without, the pressing responsibilities within. I remembered the volcano

under us. For the moment I could not think of my personal claims on the woman. I could think only of my anxiety for her. Yet I went to her and took her hand.

"Mary, — I am weary of madame and monsieur between us, — you are my wife. May I talk of our future?"

I spoke in the very words I had used the night I asked her to marry me, — to marry me for my convenience. I remembered it as I heard my tongue form the phrase, and it recalled my argument of that time,— that she must marry me because my plans were more to me than her wishes.

She withdrew from me. "Monsieur Cadillac is waiting for you. You wield great power."

Something new had come to her tone. I would have none of it. "Mary, may I talk to you?"

But still she drew away. "Monsieur, I am confused, and you are needed elsewhere. Not to-night, I beg you, not to-night."

I could not protest. In truth, I knew that Cadillac needed me. I went with her to the door.

"To-morrow, then?" I begged. "Will you listen to-morrow, madame?"

But she had grown very white. "You are important here. There is work for you. Be careful of your safety. Please be careful."

I took her hand. "Thank you, madame."

There was much in my tone that I kept out of my words, but she was not conscious of it. She was not thinking of herself, and her eyes, that were on mine, were full of trouble. All the restraint that the last weeks had taught her had come back to her look.

"You wield great power," she repeated. "You are to be the leader of the west. I see that. But oh, be careful! Good-night, monsieur."

CHAPTER XXV

OVER CADILLAC'S TABLE

I FOUND Cadillac writing, writing. Letters were his safety valve. I had only to look at his table to see how much he was perturbed.

And when I sat across from him, with the candles between, I saw that he was also perplexed. That was unusual, for commonly he was off-hand in his judgments, and leaped to conclusions like a pouncing cat. He looked at me through the candle-gloom and shook his head.

"Montlivet, you have lost twenty pounds since I saw you, and aged. Out on you, man! It is not worth it. We live ten years in one in this wilderness. We throw away our youth. Then we go back to France and find ourselves old men, worn out, uncouth, out at elbows, at odds with our generation. It is not worth it. It is not worth it, I say."

I was impatient. "What has happened since the Senecas came?"

He made a tired grimace. "Principally that I have not slept," he yawned.

"You have seen no signs of an uprising?"

He put his head between his hands, and I saw

that he was indeed weary. "There are never signs till the uprising is on us. You know that. I have done what I could. The guards are trebled, and we sleep on our swords. Montlivet, tell me. What have you been doing in the west?"

I had expected him to finesse to this question. I liked it that he gave it to me with a naked blade.

"I have been forming an Indian league," I answered bluntly.

He nodded. "I know. There have been rumors. Then I knew what you did with the St. Lawrence tribes last year. Why did you not tell me when you went through here last spring?"

I shook my head. "I wished to prove myself. It was an experiment. Then I desired a free hand."

"You did not wish my help?"

"I wished to test the ground without entangling you. If I failed, — why, I was nothing but a fur trader. There had been no talk; no explanations, nothing. A trader went west; he returned. That would end it."

"But if you succeeded?"

I bowed to him. "If I succeeded I intended to come to you for help and consultation, monsieur."

I saw his eyes gleam. The man loved war, and his imagination was fertile as a jungle. I knew that already he had taken my small vision,

magnified it a thousand-fold, and peopled it with fantasies. That was the man's mind. Fortunately he had humor, and that saved him, — that and letter-writing. He tapped out his emotion through noisy finger-tips.

"How much are you ready to tell me now?" he asked.

"Everything, — if you have patience." I rested my well arm on the table, and went carefully — almost day by day — over the time that separated me from May. I gave detail but not embroidery. Facts even if they be numerous can be disposed of shortly, if fancy and philosophy be put aside. So my recital did not take me long.

The gleam was still in Cadillac's eyes. "And you think the western tribes would follow you now?"

"They would have followed me a week ago."

He heard something sinister in my reply. "You could have wiped out that Seneca camp," he meditated.

"Yes, it could have been done."

He gave me a look. "The Malhominis wished it?"

"Yes."

"And you thought it unwise?"

"They could not have done it without a leader. And I could not lead them. I had to come here."

He smote the table till the candles flared. "You were wrong. You were wrong. You could have gathered your forces and had the attack over in a week, — in less time. Then you could have brought your troops with you, and come to my aid. You were wrong."

I moved the candles out of danger. "I had to follow madame," I said mechanically. "She might have needed me."

Cadillac's teeth clicked. "Madame" — he began, but he swallowed the sentence, and rose and walked the floor. "Do you realize what you have done? Do you realize what you have done?" he boiled out at me. "This desertion may have cost you your hold with the western tribes."

"I realize that."

And then he cursed till the candles flared again. "It was the chance of a lifetime," he concluded.

Why does the audience always feel that they understand the situation better than the actor? I was willing enough to let Cadillac rage, but resentful of the time he was using.

"What happened when the Senecas came?" I demanded.

He looked at me with puffing lips. "You know nothing?"

"Nothing."

"But Madame de Montlivet" —

"I asked her no questions."

He whistled under his breath. "Well — nothing happened. The flotilla reached here at sundown three days ago. The Baron and his followers met them at the beach and rushed the Senecas into the Huron camp. They are there now."

"But madame and Starling?"

"I demanded them of Pemaou, and he made no objection."

"He made no conditions?"

"No."

I frowned at that and thought it over.

"What do you make of it?" Cadillac questioned.

But I could only say I did not know. "Pemaou is skillful about using us as his jailers," I went on. "That may be his object now. He evidently finds some opposition in the Huron camp, or you would have had massacre before this."

"You think the Senecas are here for conquest?"

"From all I could overhear, they are here to look over the situation and exchange peace belts with the Hurons. If they can command a sufficient force, they will fall on us now; if not, they will rejoin the main camp and come to us later."

Cadillac fingered his sword. "It is rather desperate," he said quietly, and he smiled. "But

we are not conquered yet. We shall have some scalps first."

I shook my head. "Your sword is ever too uneasy. We may hold off an outbreak. They have been here three days, and they have not dared act. You wish to call a council?"

"If you will interpret."

"Give me a day first to see what I can learn. I shall be out at daybreak. What does Starling say?"

"He talks of nothing but safe conduct home. He sticks to his tale well. He is a simple-hearted, suffering man who has found his cousin and whose mission is over. He is grateful for our hospitality, he is grateful to you, he is grateful to everybody. How much shall we believe?"

"Not more than is necessary."

"Montlivet, be frank. What do you make of the man?"

I looked down. "He is a compelling man. He has a hero's frame."

"I am not blind. I asked what the frame housed."

With hate in my throat I tried to speak justly. "He has an intelligent mind, but a coward's spirit. I think the two elements war in him ceaselessly. I would not trust him, monsieur. Is he on friendly terms with Pemaou now?"

"I do not know."

"I wish you would find out for me. You have agents."

"Madame de Montlivet could tell you."

I felt Cadillac's eyes. "I shall not question Madame de Montlivet about her cousin."

Perhaps my tone was weary. It is hard to hold up a shield night and day. I was conscious that Cadillac's look altered. He withdrew his glance; he pushed a hand toward me.

"It is a shame, Montlivet."

"Shall we let it go without discussion, monsieur?"

"No. Montlivet, you are more a fool than any man I ever knew. You have more strained ideas. You are preposterous. You belong to the Middle Ages. Every one says so. Let me speak."

"Not about my marriage, monsieur."

"Why not? I am responsible. I let you saddle yourself with the situation. You did it partly to save me. You are always doing some crack-brained thing like that. I tell you, you are more a fool than I ever knew. Perhaps that is the reason that we all went into mourning when we thought the Iroquois had you."

"Monsieur! Monsieur!"

"No, wait, wait! I got you into this, I shall get you out. Unless the Indians make trouble I shall send Starling home with a convoy of my

own Indians. Your — the woman shall go with him. Then we will see what can be done about the marriage. The story shall go to the Vatican."

I moved the candles that I might see his face without the play of light and shadow between.

"Monsieur, you forget. The story that you speak of is mine. If I wish to refer it to the Vatican, I, myself, take it there. As to Madame de Montlivet, — she may wish to go east with her cousin; she may wish to remain here. The decision will rest with her. Monsieur?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I may depend on you not to mention what we have just said to any one?"

He gave me his hand. "Naturally, monsieur."

His tone touched me.

"Then to to-morrow's work," I said briskly. "Now I am to bed. I must rise early."

Cadillac went with me to the door, his arm on my well shoulder. I saw by the delay in his walk that he had more to say. It came slowly.

"Monsieur, one word. If you do not care to see madame, — if it is awkward — Well, I can arrange it without gossip. You need not see her again, and no one need know. Leave that to me."

Not see her again! I do not know what savage, insane thing sprang to life in me. I struck down Cadillac's arm.

"You take liberties. You meddle insufferably. She is my wife. I will see her when I please."

I like to think that I was not responsible, that it was the cry of a baited animal that could stand no more. Yet all the torture Cadillac had been giving me had been unconscious. He stepped back and looked at me.

"My God! You fool!"

Oh, I could have knelt to him for shame! My tongue began apology, but my face told a better tale. Cadillac held up his hand.

"Stop. Montlivet, you love the Englishwoman? Why, I thought — I beg your pardon. I was the fool."

I went stumblingly toward the door before I could face him. Then I turned and held out my hand. "There is no monopoly in fools. Monsieur, if to love a woman, to love her against her will and your own judgment, to love her hopelessly, — if that is folly, well, I am the worst of fools, the most incurable. I am glad for you to know this. Will you forget that I was a madman, monsieur?"

CHAPTER XXVI

FROM HOUR TO HOUR

It was well that I slept alone that night, for more than once before day dawned I found myself with my feet on the floor and my free arm searching for a knife. I had flouted at imagination, but now every howling dog became an Indian raising the death cry. I asked Cadillac to double the guard before the woman's quarters, but even then I slept with an ear pricked for trouble. And I was abroad early.

There are no straight roads in the wilderness; all trails are devious. So with an Indian's mind. I sat in Longuant's skin-roofed lodge and filled hours with talk of Singing Arrow. The girl was to wed Pierre at noon the next day. The marriage was to be solemnized in the chapel the next afternoon, and the whites were to attend. The affair was perhaps worth some talk, if Longuant and I had been squaws yawning over our basket-work. But we were men with knives, and Fear was whispering at our shoulders.

The sun climbed, and noises and odors of mid-day came in the tent door. I plumped out a direct question.

"The tree of friendship that grows for the Ottawas and the French, — are its roots deep, Longuant?"

The old chief looked at me. "What has my brother seen?"

"The Iroquois wolf, my brother. The Iroquois wolf snapping at the roots of this stately tree. What will the Ottawas do, Longuant? Will they drive the wolf away?"

The chief still studied me. "When a tree is healthy," he argued, "a wolf cannot harm it; as well dread the butterfly that lights on its leaves or the ant that runs around its trunk. It is only when a tree is unsound at heart that the snapping of a wolf can jar it. And an unsound tree is dangerous. My brother will agree that it is best to cut it down."

I rose. "The wolf can do more than snap; his fangs are poisoned. Listen, my brother. This tree of friendship is dear to me. I have given labor to preserve it; I have watered it; I have killed the insects and small pests that would have nibbled at its branches. Now that I see its roots threatened, my heart is heavy and the sun looks dim. Can my brother brighten the world for me? Can he tell me that my fears are light as mist?"

Longuant looked at the ground. In repose his face was very sad, as are the faces of most savage leaders.

"I have only two eyes, two ears," he crooned monotonously. "My brother has as many. Let him use them."

"And you will not lift your hatchet to save the tree?"

Longuant raised his eyes. "The hatchet of the Ottawas is always bright. My brethren will hold it in readiness. If the tree looks strong and worth saving, they will raise the hatchet and defend it. If the tree is unsound, they will put the hatchet at its roots."

Well, I had my answer. And, to be just, I could not blame them. The Ottawas were never a commanding people. Their chief was wise to throw his vote with the winning side. But I turned away saddened.

Longuant followed. "There is always a bed in the lodges of the Ottawas for my brother of the red heart. Will he sleep in it?"

I turned. "Would my head be safer if I did, O brother of the wise tongue?"

"My brother has said it."

I took a Flemish knife from my pocket and handed it to him.

"Take it, my brother, for my gratitude. It shall not cut the friendship between us. It shall cut any stranger that would come between your heart and mine. Longuant, I have a wife. She is fair, and stars shine in her eyes. She has

loved a daughter of your people. I cannot hide in your lodge, — a man who carries a sword must use it, — but will you take my wife and keep her? Will you keep her with Singing Arrow for a few days?"

Longuant thought a moment. He looked at the knife as if it were a talisman to teach him how much he could trust me; he tried its edge, put it in his pouch, and made up his mind.

"My brother is keen and true as the blade of the knife. I will tell him a story, a story that the birds sang. The eagle once married. He married one of the family of the hawk. But the hawk found the eagle's nest too high, so she flew lower to a nest near her own kin. Listen. So long as the hawk stays near the hawk and is not seen with the eagle, the wolf will spare her. But when she comes back to the eagle's nest in the high tree, then let her beware. I have spoken. Now let my brother go on his way and see what his eyes and ears can teach him."

But I went my way with thought busier than eyes. So I must keep away from the woman. I went to my room, found paper and a quill, and wrote to her. It was the first time I had written her name. It seemed foreign to me, almost a sad jest, as it flowed out under my hand.

"I cannot come to you to-day," I wrote; "perhaps not for some days to come. I shall be

watching you, guarding you. I think I can assure you that you are in no danger. For the rest, I must beg of you to wait for me and to trust me. The women of the name you bear have often had the same burden laid on them and have carried it nobly. Yet I know that your courage will match and overreach anything they have shown. I salute you, madame, in homage. I shall come to you the moment that I may."

I subscribed myself her husband. Yet even the Indians gossiped that the eagle's nest was empty. Well, I had work on hand.

So I found Cadillac. I told him in five minutes what it had taken me five hours to learn.

"We must give our strength now to winning the Hurons," I said. "I will work with them this afternoon. If we can get through this one night safely I think we can carry the council."

Cadillac shrugged, but sped me on my way. "Be careful of to-night. Be careful of to-night," he repeated monotonously. His eyes were growing bloodshot from anxiety and loss of sleep.

The afternoon slipped away from me like running water, yet I wasted no word or look. I dropped my old custom of letting my tongue win the way for my ears, and I dealt out blunt questions like a man at a forge. At one point I was foiled. I could not discover whether Starling —

whom personally I had not seen — was in communication with the Hurons.

The sun set, the sky purpled, and the moon rose. It rose white and beautiful, and it shone on a peaceful settlement. I went to my room and found a Huron squatting on my threshold. He gave me a handful of maize.

"Our chief, whom you call the Baron, sends this to you," he said. "He bids you eat the corn, and swallow with it the suspicion that you feel. You have sat all day with other chiefs, but your brother the Baron has not seen you. His lodge cries out with emptiness. He bids you come to him now."

I thought a moment. "Go in front of me," I told the Huron.

I whistled as I went. A sheep that goes to the shambles of its own accord deserves to be butchered, and I was walking into ambush. But still I whistled. I whistled the same tune again and again, and I did it with great lung power. My progress was noisy.

And so we went through the Huron camp. The lodges of the Baron's followers were massed to one side, and as I whistled and swaggered my way past their great bark parallelograms, I saw preparations for war. The braves carried quivers, and were elaborately painted. Fires were burning, though the night was warm, and women

nearly naked, and swinging kettles of red-hot coals, danced heavily around the blaze. They leered at me when they heard my whistle, but they made no attempt to hide from me. Evidently I was not important; I was not to be allowed to go back to the French camp alive, so I could do no harm. I whistled the louder.

I reached the Baron's lodge, and looked within. Two fires blazed in the centre, and some fifty Indians sat in council. I would not enter. The smoke and fire were in my eyes, but I recognized several of the younger chiefs, and called them by name.

"Come out here to me," I commanded. "I will show you something."

There was a grunting demur, and no one rose. I whistled again and stopped to laugh. The laugh pricked their curiosity, and the chiefs straggled out. They stood in an uncertain group and looked at me. It was dark; the moon was still low, and the shadows black and sprawling. The open doors of the lodges sent out as much smoke as fireshine.

I let them look for a moment, then I took the handful of maize and threw it in their faces. "Listen!" I cried. "Chiefs, you are traitors. You eat the bread of the French, yet you would betray them. You plan an uprising to-night. Well, you will find us ready. I whistled as I

came to you. That was a signal. You think you can overpower us. Try it. Seize me, if you like. If you do, I shall give one more whistle, and my troops — the loyal Indians — will go to work. You can see them gathering. Look."

I waved my hand at the murk around us. My words were brave but my flesh was cold. I had told them to look, but what would they see? Would my men be loyal? Then the signal, — it had been hastily agreed upon, — would they understand it? I had to push myself around like a dead body to face what I might find.

For a moment I thought that I had found nothing. But I looked again, and saw that my eyes had been made blank by fear. For my men were massed to east and west. They pressed nearer and nearer, and the moon picked out points of light that marked knives and arquebuses. Some wore uniforms, and some were naked and vermilion-dyed, but all were watching me. I could not see their eyes, but I was conscious of them.

I pointed the chiefs to the prospect. "You see. I have only to whistle, and we shall settle this question of who is master here. Seize me, and I shall whistle. But I shall do nothing till you move first. If we are to have war, you must begin it. Are you ready?"

Silence followed. It was a hard silence for me

to get through calmly, for I knew that my men were not so numerous as they appeared, and I feared to be taken at my word. Pemaou glided up and spoke to his father. I had not seen him since the night in the Seneca camp, and I argued with myself to keep my head cool so that I should not spring on him. His body was blackened with charcoal, and he wore a girdle of otter skin with the body of a crow hanging from it. I had sometimes been called the crow because of my many tongues, and I understood his meaning. But I could only stand waiting, and the moments went on and on.

It was a small thing that determined the issue. In the distance Pierre began to whistle, — Pierre, the bridegroom of the morrow, the merry bully of the night. He had a whistle in keeping with his breadth of shoulder, and he used it like a mating cock. He whistled my tune, the signal. It was not accident, I think, neither was it design. It was his unconscious, blundering black art, his intuition that was witchcraft.

The Baron drew himself up. He put out a protesting hand, and his dignity of gesture would have shamed an Israelitish patriarch.

"We called our brother to council. What does our brother mean? He is moon-mad when he talks of war in the house of his friends, the Hurons."

I yawned in his face. "You called me to council? But the council is to-morrow night. The commandant calls it. Save your fair words for him."

I turned on my heel to leave, but the Baron held me. He eyed me above his blanket.

"My brother has been called the man who steals the Indian's heart from his body," he purred at me. "He has stolen mine. The commandant is a fool; I cannot talk to him. But to you, my brother, I can open my heart. Come with me to my lodge and listen. You shall be safe. In token of my love I give you this calumet," and he took his great feathered pipe — the pipe that means honor to the lowest of savages — and would have thrust it in my hands.

I was too nonplussed to remember to laugh. An offer to buy me, and from the Indian who hated me most! They must indeed be afraid of me, — and with what little cause. Where had my reputation come? I knew my own weakness. Well, I must play on my fame while it lasted. So, without deigning to answer, I turned away. My troops hedged me like a wall as I went back to the French camp, but I did not speak to them. It was strange to see them melt before me. I did not wonder that the Hurons smelled witchcraft where, in fact, there was only bluster and a pleading tongue.

I stood for a moment and looked at the garrison. The moon had crept high and the place was very still. We were safe for the night. I lit my pipe, and the smoke that spiraled above me did not seem more filmy than the chance that had saved us. I suddenly shivered. But we were safe. I gave the troops the signal to disband.

I stopped for a moment at Cadillac's door. "Sleep well," I said, with my hand on his; "we have bridged to-night. Now for the council to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXVII

IN COUNCIL

THE next morning showed the face of War without her mask. The Indians sat in open council, and the tom-toms sounded from lodge to lodge. In the Huron camp there were council rings of the women; it was a tribal crisis and was met by a frenzy of speech-making. As a rival interest Singing Arrow's wedding made little stir.

I went to the wedding and saw Pierre the savage transformed into Pierre the citizen, the yoke-bearer. I feared the transformation was not final. Yet I could never read my giant. There were unexpected ridges of principle in the general slough of his makeup and perhaps the Indian girl was resting on one of them.

The woman came to the wedding, Starling with her. I bowed to them both, but I would do no more, for the Indians were watching. The woman looked pale and grave. I had seen her angry and I had seen her despairing, but I had never before seen her dispirited. She looked so now.

And then came the general council with

Cadillac in the chair. It was held in a barrack room and the tribes had forty chiefs in waiting. There were Ottawas, Hurons, and the party of Senecas. Feathered and painted, they were as expressionless as the stone calumets in their hands; by contrast, our French faces were childishly open and expressive.

Cadillac looked them over and began his speech. Commonly his tongue ran trippingly, but with the opening words his speech halted. I knew he was moved. With all his volubility the man took responsibility heavily, and these strange bronze men with their cruel eyes and impassive faces were his wards. He spoke in French, and I translated first to the Hurons, then to the Ottawas. He called the tribes to aid him in brightening the covenant chain, and his rhetoric mounted with his theme till I felt my blood heat with admiration for him. He concluded with a plea for loyalty, and he gave each nation a belt to bind his words.

And then the chiefs rose in reply. The Hurons spoke first, and though they hedged their meaning by look and word I could feel the sentiment swaying toward our side. They brought up many minor points and gave belts in confirmation. Kondiaronk's clan were openly friendly, openly touched by Cadillac's speech, and when one of the Baron's band took the cue and gave

a wampum necklace, "to deter the French brothers from unkind thoughts," I felt that the worst of the day was over, and welcomed the Ottawa speakers with a relaxation of the tension that had held me, for I had been upon the rack. Mind and ear had been taxed to miss no word or intonation, for a slighted syllable might lose our cause. The speeches had droned like flies at midday, but all the verbiage had been heavy with significance. I spoke French, Huron, and Ottawa in turn, and through it all I listened, listened for the opening of the door.

For Cadillac had told me that Madame de Montlivet had asked if she might come in for a moment and listen to the council, and he had referred the matter to me. It had seemed a strange request, but I could see no reason for refusing it. The woman had seen Indians in camp and field; it was perhaps no wonder that she wished to see the machinery of their politics. It was agreed that Dubisson should bring her in for a short time.

Yet when she did come in I could not look at her. Longuant had just finished speaking, and I had all my mind could handle to do him justice as I wished. He spoke as the moderate leader who desired that his people leave the hatchet unlifted if they could do so with safety. He gave a robe stained with red to show that his

people remembered the French who had died for them.

I knew, as I repeated Longuant's speech, that I was doing it well, helping it out with trick and metaphor. And I also knew, with a shrug for my childishness, that my wits were working more swiftly than they had, because the woman was listening. I saw the whole scene with added vividness and significance because her eyes rested on it, too. Once I glanced up and looked at her briefly. Day had slipped into dusk, and the bare, shadow-haunted room was lighted with torches stuck in the crannies of the log walls. The flaring light lapped her like a waving garment and showed her daintily erect, silk-clad, elate and resolute, a flower of a carefully tended civilization. And then my eyes went back where they belonged, to the lines of warriors robed like senators, attentive and august, full of wisdom where the woman knew nothing, yet blank as animals to the treasures of her mind. The contrast thrilled through me like a violin note. I heard my tongue use imagery that I did not know was in me. The woman waited till I was through, and I could feel that she was listening. Then she turned with Dubisson and they went out of the door.

Longuant was the last of our garrison Indians to speak, and when he finished it remained to

Cadillac to sum up the situation. He picked out the oldest men from each delegation and stood before them. Yet, though he spoke to all, it was at Longuant that he looked.

"Listen," he said. "Hast ever seen the moon in the lake when the evening is clear and the weather calm? It appears in the water, yet nothing is truer than that it is in the sky. Some among you are very old; but know, that were you all to return to early youth and take it into your heads to fish up the moon in the lake, you would more easily succeed in scooping that planet up in your nets than in effecting what you are ruminating now. In vain do you fatigue your brains. You cannot live with the bear and share your food with the wolf. You must choose. Be assured of this; the English and French cannot be in the same place without killing one another."

There was more in the same vein. Only one nation could hold the country for the fur trade. If the French were that nation the Indians would be protected, their fighting men would be given arms, their families would be cared for, the great father at Quebec would reward them as brothers. He gave the Hurons and Ottawas each a war belt to testify to his intention.

Here was the crisis. But each tribe took the belt and kept it. I could scarcely forbear glan-

cing at Cadillac. But I dared not be too elated, for we had yet the Senecas to deal with. Cadillac turned to them and asked their mission among us. He did it briefly, and I hoped they would answer with equal bluntness, for I dreaded this part of the council. All of the Iroquois nations were trained rhetoricians, and I would need a long ear to catch their verbal quibbles and see where their sophistry was hiding.

Cannehoot, their oldest chief, spoke for them all. He made proposal after proposal with belts and tokens to seal them. His speech was moderate, but his ideas crowded; it was hard to keep them in sequence.

They had come to learn wisdom of us. They gave a belt.

They had come to wipe the war paint from our soldiers' faces. They gave another belt.

They wished the sun to shine on us. They gave a large marble as red as the sun.

They wished the rain of heaven to wash away hatred. They gave a chain of wampum.

And so on and on and on. They gave belts, beavers, trinkets. They had peace in their mouths and kindness in their hearts. They desired to tie up the hatchet, to sweep the road between the French and themselves free from blood. But with that clause they gave no belt. They made no mention of the English prisoners,

and they desired to close their friendly visit and to go home.

Cadillac looked at them with contempt. He was always too choleric to hide his mind, and he answered with little pretense at civility. He gave them permission to go home, and sent a knife by them to their kindred. It was not for war, he told them, but that they might cut the veil that hung before their eyes, and see things as they really were. He left their belts lying on the floor, and dismissed the council. He motioned to me to follow, and we went at once to his room.

And alone in his room we looked at each other with relief. We had gained one point, and though the road was long ahead, we could breathe for a moment. We had not healed the sore, but it was covered, cauterized. We dropped into chairs and sought our pipes.

But Cadillac's fingers were soon drumming. "It was odd that they did not demand the English prisoners," he said.

I felt placid enough as regarded that point. "They did not dare. When do the Senecas leave?"

"To-morrow morning. Oh, Montlivet, it grinds me to let them go!"

I shrugged at his choler. "We will follow," I comforted. "We will overtake them at La Baye."

"But suppose they leave La Baye. They may

break camp at once and push on. We may miss them."

I smoked, and shook my head. "If they do, we cannot help it. But I think there is no danger. They will want to halt some time at La Baye, and try for terms with those tribes. My work there has been secret, — even Pemaou does not seem to know of it, — and they do not suspect a coalition. So they feel safe. I think that we shall find them."

And then we sat for a time in silence. I stared at the future, and saw a big decision beetling before me. When I dread a moment, I rush to meet it, which is the behavior of a spoiled boy.

"You will get rid of Starling to-morrow?" I asked.

Cadillac nodded. "Yes. He is best out of the way, and, though I see nothing to mistrust in the man, I shall feel better if he goes east while the Senecas go west."

"How will you send him?"

"To Montreal with an escort of Ottawas. From there he can make his own way."

I looked down. "Madame de Montlivet may wish to go at the same time. You must arrange for her also if she wishes."

Cadillac shrugged. "You leave the decision with her?"

"Absolutely, monsieur."

Cadillac rapped his knuckles together. "Don't run romanticism into the ground, Montlivet."

But my inflammable temper did not rise. "A woman certainly has some right of selection. Starling says that I forced her to marry me. That is substantially true. What time do you plan to have Starling leave?"

"As early as possible. I shall not tell him to-night. It will take a little time to get the canoes in readiness."

"Then I shall see Madame de Montlivet in the morning, as early as possible. I shall let you know her decision at once, monsieur."

"Montlivet, she will need time to consider."

I shook my head. "She has thought the matter out. I think her answer will be ready." And then we said good-night.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CHILDREN OF OPPORTUNITY

It was but little after dawn the next morning when I met Madame de Montlivet in the waiting-room of the commandant.

It was a crisp, clear morning, blue of water and sky. I stood at the window and looked at the water-way that led to the east, and waited for my wife. I had several speeches prepared for her, but when she came I said none of them. I took her hand and led her to the window.

"Look at the path of the sun, madame. It was just such a morning when you came to me first."

Her hand lingered a moment in mine. "I came to the most gallant gentleman that I have ever known."

With all the kindness of her words there was something in them that spoke of parting. "Then will you stay with him?" I cried. "Mary, I know no gallant gentleman. To me he seems much a fool and a dreamer. But such as he is he is loyally yours. Will you stay with him? Or will you start for Montreal this morning with your cousin?"

"This morning?"

"Yes, as soon as the canoes can be made ready. I did not know this till after midnight. I wish I might have warned you."

"This is warning enough. I was sure that this was what you had to tell me when you asked for me so early. There is but one thing for me to do. I must go with my cousin."

I heard the words, but I felt incredulous, stupid. I was prepared to meet this decision after argument, not to have it fall on me in this leaden way. I dropped her hand and walked to and fro. It was useless to ask if she had thought out her decision carefully. Her tone disposed of that. I went back and stood before her.

"The question is yours to decide. Yet I should be a strange man if I let you go without being sure I understood your motives. If you go because you wish to be free from me,— that is all that need be said. But if I have failed to woo you as a man should — You sealed my lips. Will you let me open them now?"

Perhaps my hand went out to her. At all events she drew away, and I thought her look frightened, as if something urged her to me that she must resist.

"No, no, you must not woo me, you must not. I beg you, monsieur."

I looked at her panic and shook my head.

"Why do you fear to love me, to yield to me? You are my wife."

"I told you. I told you the day — the last day that we were together in the woods. It would be a tragedy if we loved, monsieur."

"But you are my wife."

She looked at me. The light from the window fell full in her great eyes, and they were the eyes of the boy who had looked up at me in that very room; the boy who had captured me, against my reason, by his spirit and will. I felt the same challenge now.

"I am your wife, yes," she was saying slowly. "That is, the priest said some words over us that we both denied in our hearts. I cannot look at marriage in that way, monsieur. No priest, no ritual can make a marriage if the right thing is not there. The fact that you gave me your name to shield me does not give me a claim on you in my mind. Wait. Let me say more. You have great plans, great opportunity. You will make a great leader, monsieur."

Her words sounded mockery. "Thank you, madame." I knew my tone was bitter.

She looked at me reproachfully. "Monsieur, you are unkind. I meant what I said. I heard you in the council yesterday. I asked to go in that I might hear you. I know something of what you have done this summer. I know how

you fended away massacre the other night. This is a crucial time, and you are the only man who can handle the situation; the only man who has influence to lead the united tribes. Your opportunity is wonderful. You are making history. You may be changing the map of nations, you — alone here — working with a few Indians. Believe me, I see it all. It is wonderful, monsieur."

"But what has this to do with you and me?"

"Just this, monsieur. I cannot forget my blood. I am an Englishwoman. I come of a family that has chosen exile rather than yield a point of honor that involved the crown. I have been bred to that idea of country, nurtured on it. Could I stay with you and see you work against my people? If I were a different sort of woman; if I were the gentle girl that you should marry, — one who knew no life but flattery and courts, like the lady of the miniature, — why, then it might be possible for me to think of you only in relation to myself, and to forget all that you stood for. But I am — what I am. I have known tragedy and suffering. I cannot blind myself with dreams as a girl might, and I understand fully the significance of what you are doing. We should have a divided hearth, monsieur."

She had made her long speech with breaks, but I had not interrupted her. And now that

she had finished I did not speak till she looked at me in wonder.

"I am thinking. I see that it comes to this, madame. I must renounce either my work or my wife."

She suddenly stretched out her hand. "Oh, I would not have you renounce your work, monsieur!"

A chair stood in front of her, and I brushed it away and let it clatter on the floor.

"Mary! Mary, you love me!"

"No, no!" she cried. "No, monsieur, it need not mean I love you, — it need not." She fled from me and placed a table between us. "Surely a woman can understand a man's power, and glory in it — yes, glory in it, monsieur — without loving the man!"

"But if you did love me, — if you did love me, what then?"

"Oh, monsieur, the misery of it for us if we loved! I have seen it from the beginning, though at times I forgot. For there is nothing for us but to part."

"Many women have forgotten country for their husbands. The world has called them wise."

She put out her hand. "Not in my family, monsieur."

And then the face of Lord Starling came before me. "You have changed from the woman of

the wilderness. You changed when you put on this gown. You were different even three days ago. Some influence has worked on you here."

She understood me. "Yes, my cousin has talked to me. Yet I think that I am not echoing him, monsieur. If I have hardened in the last few days, it is because I have come to see the inevitableness of what I am saying now. I have grasped the terrible significance of what is happening. May I ask you some questions?"

"Yes, Mary."

"Oh, you must not — The Seneca messengers, you will let them go back and rejoin their camp?"

"We can do nothing else."

"And you will follow them, and attack them at La Baye?"

"So we plan."

"But the Senecas trust you."

"Not for a moment. They think we fear their power over the Hurons, — as we do, — so they are reckless. They are undoubtedly carrying peace belts from our Hurons to the Iroquois and the English. We must intercept them."

She tried to ward my words, and all that they stood for, away. "You see! You see!" she cried, "we must part. We must part while we can. Monsieur, say no more. I beg you, monsieur." And she dropped in a chair by the table and laid her head in her arms.

I could say nothing. I stood helpless and dizzy. I had asked her to forget her country. Yet not once had she asked me to forget mine. If I gave up my plans I could go to her now and draw her to my breast. I gripped the table, and I did not see clearly. To save her life I had jeopardized my plans; to follow her here I had jeopardized them again. But now that I knew her to be safe — No, I could not turn back; I must walk the path I had laid for myself.

"What will you do with yourself, with your life?" I asked with stiff lips.

She did not raise her head. "We are both children of opportunity. What is left either of us but ambition, monsieur?"

"You will help your cousin in his plans?"

"If he will work for the state."

"But you will not marry him?"

"Monsieur, I bear your name! That — that troubles me sorely. To bear your name yet work against France! Yet what can I do?"

I touched her hair. "Carry my name and do what you will. I shall understand. As to what the world thinks,— we are past caring for that, madame."

And then for a time we sat silent. I thought, with stupid iteration, of how like a jest this had sounded when the woman said it to me in the forest: a matter for coquetry, a furnishing of foils

for the game. If I had realized then — But no, what could I have done?

One thing my thought cried incessantly, — women were not made for patriotism. Yet even as accompaniment to the thought, a long line of women who had given up life and family for country passed before my memory. Could I say that this woman beside me had not equal spirit?

It seemed long that we sat there, though I think that it was not. I laid my hand on hers, and she turned her palm that she might clasp my fingers.

"You have never failed me, never, never," she whispered. "You are not failing me now." And then I heard Starling's voice at the door calling my name.

I opened to him mechanically, and accepted his pleasant phrases with a face like wood, though my manner was apt enough, I think. I had no feeling as regarded him; all my thought was with the woman by the table.

He went to her with his news, but she interrupted him. "I know." Her face was as expressionless as my own. "I am going with you," she said to him. "When do we leave?"

"In a few minutes." He looked from one to the other of us, and if he could not probe the situation it was perhaps no wonder. We had forgotten him, and we sat like dead people. For once

his tremendous, compelling presence was ignored, yet my tongue replied to him courteously, and I could not but admit the perfection of his attitude. He deplored the necessity that took his cousin from me; he, and all of his people, labored under great indebtedness to me. He was dignified, direct of thought and speech. The man whom I had seen by the dead ashes of the camp fire; the man who had held my wife's miniature, and taunted me with what it meant, — that man was gone. This was an elder brother, a grave elder brother, chastened by suffering.

The woman closed the scene. "I am prepared to go with you," she told him. "I shall wait here till the canoes are ready. Will you leave me with my husband?"

She had never before said "husband" in my hearing. As soon as the door clicked behind Starling I went to her. I knelt and laid my cheek on her hand.

"You are going to stay with me, Mary. You are my wife. You cannot escape that. It is fundamental. Patriotism is a man-made feeling. You are going to stay with me. I am going now to tell Cadillac."

But I could feel her tremble. "If you say more, I must leave you. You cannot alter my mind. What has come must come. Can we not sit together in silence till I go?"

And so I sat beside her. "You are a strange woman," I said at length.

She looked at me as if to plead her own cause. "Strange events have made me. I cannot marvel if you are bitter, for I have brought you unhappiness. Yet it was in this room that I asked you to remember that I went with you against my will."

"I remember."

"And will you remember what — what I have seen? Is it strange that I understand; that I know we must part?"

I shook my head. "It is your cousin's mind impressed on yours that tells you that we must part, — that and your unfathomable spirit, — the spirit that carried you in man's dress through those weeks as a captive. It is that same spirit that will bring you back to me some day."

"Monsieur!"

"That will bring you back."

"Monsieur, no. I cannot change myself."

"Would I have you change? Mary, Mary! I took you as a boy with me to the wilderness because you had an unbreakable will and a fanatic's courage. Yet this is not the end. It is not the end."

She did not answer, and again she laid her head on the table. We had but a few minutes left now. I saw her look up at me twice before I

heard her whisper, "Monsieur, you said that I loved you. But you never said that you" —

"Would it change your decision if I said it now?"

"No, no! It could not."

I slipped to my knees and laid my lips on her clasped hands. "You are part of me. You go with me whether you will or no. You are in the red sunsets that we saw together, and in the white dawns when we ate our meal and meat side by side. You are fettered to me. I cannot rid myself of your presence for a moment. I shall tell you more of this when you come to me again."

She bent to me with the color driven from her lips. "Don't! Don't! We will learn to forget. We are both rulers of our wills. We will learn to forget. Wait — Are they calling me?"

We listened. Cadillac was at the door. We both rose.

"In a moment," I called to him. Then I turned. "Whatever happens, keep to the eastward. Don't let your Indians turn. Refuse, and make Starling refuse, to listen to any change of plan."

She was trembling. She seemed not to hear me, and I said the words again. "You must promise. You are not to go to the west."

And then she put out her hands to me. "Yes, yes, I understand. I promise. I shall not go

west. But, monsieur, do not — do not go with me to the shore. Let me go alone. Let us part here."

I could have envied her the power to tremble. I felt like stone. I had but one arm, but I drew her to me till I felt her heart on mine. "This is not the end. This is not the end. But till you come to me again" — And I would have laid my lips on hers.

But she was out of my grasp. "We — we — It was a compact. If we — If we did that, we could not part. Good-by, monsieur. I beg you not to go with me. God be with you. God be with you, monsieur."

I followed to the door and held to its casing as I looked after her. She had met Cadillac, and was walking with him. She, whom I had always seen erect, was leaning on his arm.

CHAPTER XXIX

I FOLLOW MY PATH

A FULL hour later I went to Cadillac. "I am leaving," I said. "I am taking Pierre. The Ottawa girl, his wife, says she is going with us. It is foolish, —but Pierre wishes it. He is dough in her hands."

Cadillac shook my well shoulder. "Go to bed for a day. You are ash color."

"No, I must be on my way. The time is short enough as it is. Have the Senecas gone?"

"No, it will be some hours before they are ready. If you start now, you will be enough in advance to keep out of sight."

I could not forbear a shrug. "Three hours' start to collect an army! Well, it shall serve. And you follow to-morrow?"

Cadillac gave a trumpeting laugh. "Yes, to-morrow. I shall take a hundred men and leave a hundred here for guard. I have made arrangements. Longuant leads the Ottawas, and old Kondiaronk the loyal Hurons. Where shall we meet you?"

"I cannot tell. Stop at the Pottawatamie Islands and Onanguissé will know. Keep watch of Pemaou. He will make trouble if he can."

Cadillac looked at the horizon. "Montlivet, I have bad news. Pemaou has gone."

"Gone! Where?"

"I don't know. To the Seneca camp, probably. His canoes have just left."

I tapped the ground. I was tired and angry. "You should have prevented such a possibility," I let myself say.

But he kept his temper. "What could I have done?" he asked quietly. "I have no authority in my garrison."

I regretted my outburst. "You could not have done anything," I hastened. "And if Pemaou has indeed gone to the Senecas, it is good news for me. I am impatient for a meeting with him that I did not dare have here for fear of entangling myself and losing time. I shall hope for an encounter in the west. And now I am away, monsieur."

I wished to leave with as little stir as possible, so Pierre took the canoe around the point, and I joined him there. To reach the rendezvous I walked through the old maize field where I had met the English captive. It had been moonlight then. Now it was hot noon, and the waves of light made me faint. I had forgotten breakfast. I cursed myself at the omission, for I needed strength.

But I was not to leave quite unattended.

When I reached the canoe, I found Father Carheil talking to Singing Arrow. I was glad to see him. There was something that propped my pride and courage in his irritable, tender greeting.

He pressed a vial into my hands. "It is confection of Jacinth. It has great virtue. Take it with you, my son."

I knelt. "I would rather take your blessing, father."

He gave it to me, and his old hands trembled. "Come back, my son. Come back safely. You will return this way?"

I looked off at the blue, beckoning west. "I do not know, father. I go without ties or responsibilities. I am not sure where I shall end. I doubt that I return this way."

"But where, my son? Where do you go?"

I pointed, and his mystic glance followed my hand. "Out there in the blue, father, — somewhere. I don't know where. It has beckoned you thus far; can you resist its cry to you to come farther and force its secrets from it?"

He clutched his rosary, and I knew I had touched one of his temptations. He loved the wilderness as I have never seen it loved. Even his fellow priests and the few soldiers and traders crowded him. He wanted the land alone, — alone with his Indians. He would not look at the blue track.

"It is the path of ambition, and it is strewn with wrecks. Come back to us here, my son."

But I would not look away from the west. "Some day I shall come back. Not now. Father, I married Ambition. She lives in the wilderness. I think I shall abide with her the next year."

He frowned at me. "Where has Madame de Montlivet gone?"

"She has started for her home in England, father."

He tapped his teeth with his forefinger. "You sent a curious guard with her. Take the advice of an old man who has lived among Indians. It is usually unwise to mix tribes."

"What do you mean?"

"You should have sent a guard of Ottawas with your wife and Starling."

"They were all Ottawas."

"No, they were more than half Hurons. I counted."

I jammed my teeth together and tried to think. I had just said that the west was calling me, that I was untrammeled. Untrammeled! Why, I was enmeshed, choked by conflicting duties. I put my head back, and breathed hard.

"Father, are you sure? Cadillac himself saw to it that they were all Ottawas."

The priest stepped forward and wiped his hand-

kerchief across my face. It was wet. "My son, take this more calmly. Cadillac does not know one Indian from another. Does this mean harm?"

I shook the sweat from my fingers. "I do not know what it means. But I must go west. I must. Hundreds of men depend on me. Father Carheil?"

"Yes, my son."

"I bound you once on this very spot. May I bind you again?"

"With promises?"

"Yes. Will you see Cadillac at once, tell him what you know, and have a company of Ottawas sent in pursuit of Lord Starling? Will you yourself see that it is rightly done?"

His foot drummed a tattoo. "I ask no favors of the commandant."

"Father!"

"Oh yes, I" —

"Then go at once, I beg you. Hasten."

He shook his head at me, but he turned and ran. I watched him a moment, then I stepped in the canoe.

"I will take a paddle," I told Pierre. "I can do something with my left hand. Singing Arrow must take one, too."

It had come to me before in my life to be compelled to force the apparently impossible out of

opportunity. But never had I asked myself to attempt such a task as this. I had only one day the start of Cadillac, and in that time I must collect an army. But if success were within human reach I was well armored to secure it, for I carried a desperate heart.

So if I say we went swiftly, it conveys no meaning of what we really accomplished. We paddled as long as our arms would obey us, slept sparingly, and paddled again. Singing Arrow was worth two men. She paddled for us, cooked for us, and packed the bales when our hands blundered with weariness. She was tireless.

And watching her I saw something lived before me day by day that I had tried to forget was in the world. There was love between this Indian woman and my peasant Pierre. They had found the real love, the love that is wine and meat. It was very strange. Pierre was quiet, and he was wont to be boisterous, but he looked into the girl's eyes, and I saw that both of them forgot that the hours of work were long. I have not seen this miracle many times, though I have seen many marriages. What had Pierre done that he should find it?

Well, the west called me. And if a man whines under his luck, that proves that he deserves all that has happened.

And so we reached the Pottawatamie Islands.

We were so cramped and exhausted that we staggered as we tried to walk from the canoe, yet we remained at the islands but an hour. And in that hour I talked to Onanguissé and the old men, and perfected our plans. When we embarked again we had two large canoes with strong-armed Pottawatamies at the paddles. We were on our way to the Malhominis, and I slept most of the distance, for nature was in revolt. Yet through all my heavy slumber droned the voice of Onanguissé, and always he repeated what he had said when we parted.

"I called her the turtle dove. But at heart she was an eagle. Did you ask her to peck and twitter like a tame robin? I could have told you that she would fly away."

We reached the mouth of the Wild Rice River at evening, and pushed up through the reeds in the darkness. I knew if Pemaou was lying in ambush for me this would be the place for him. But we reached the village safely, so I said to myself that the Huron had grown slow-witted.

In other times, in times before the broth of life had lost its salt, I should have enjoyed that moment of entry into the Malhominis camp. The cry that met me was of relief and welcome, but I ignored all greetings till I had pushed my way to the pole where the dried band of rushes still hung. I tore it away, and hung a silver chain

in its place. "Brother!" I said to Outchipouac, and he gave me his calumet in answer.

And then I had ado to compel a hearing. The Malhominis repented their injustice, and would have overpowered me with rejoicings and flattery, but I made them understand at last that I had but two hours to spend with them, and they quieted like children before a tutor. My first question was for news of Labarthe and Leclerc, but I learned nothing. Indeed, the Malhominis could tell me nothing of the Seneca camp beyond the fact that it was still there. They had cowered in their village dreading a Seneca attack, and they were feverishly anxious for concerted action. They suggested that I save time by sending messengers to the Chippewas and Winnebagoes, while I went myself to the Sac camp.

This was good advice and I adopted it. I drew maps on bark, gave the messengers my watchword, and instructed them what to say. The rendezvous I had selected was easy to find. Some few miles south of the Seneca camp a small river debouched into La Baye des Puants. We would meet there. Cadillac and the Pottawatamies would come together from the north; the Malhominis, the Winnebagoes, and the Chippewas would come separately, and I would lead the Sacs under my command. All was agreed upon, and I saw the messengers dispatched. Then I

took a canoe and eight men, and started on my own journey. It was then past midnight.

The eight men worked well. By sunrise I was fighting the dogs and the stench in the Sacs village, and by eleven the same morning I was on my way again with eighty braves following. The Sacs were such clumsy people in canoes that I did not dare trust them on the water, so we arranged to make a detour to the west and reach the rendezvous by land.

It was a terrible journey. We had to make on foot nearly double the distance that the other tribes would make by canoe, so we gave ourselves no rest. The trail led by morass and fallen timber, and it was the season of stinging gnats and breathless days. The Sacs were always filthy in camp or journeying, and I turned coward at the food I was obliged to eat. But I did not dare leave them and trust them to come alone. They were a fierce, sullen people, unstable as hyenas, but they were terrible in war. I had won some power over them, and they followed me with the eyes of snarling dogs. But they would not have gone a mile without my hand to beckon.

So through filth and gnats, heat, toil, and lack of food, I followed Ambition.

CHAPTER XXX

THE MEANING OF CONQUEST

When I stumbled along the bank of the little stream that marked our rendezvous, I was mud-splashed, torn, and insect-poisoned, and I led a brutish set of ruffians. Yet I heard a muffled cheer roar out as I came into view. The Winnebagoes were in camp and in waiting.

I forgot ache and weariness. The Winnebagoes were fifty in all, picked men, and I looked them over and exulted. Erect and clean-limbed, they were as dignified and wonderful as a row of fir trees, and physically I felt a sorry object beside them. Yet they hailed me as leader, and placing me on a robe of deerskins carried me into camp. They smoked the pipe of fealty with me, and when I slept that night I knew that my dream castles of the last two years were at last shaping into something I could touch and handle. Their glitter was giving way to masonry.

The morning brought the Malhominis, the noon the Chippewas. I hoped for the French and the Pottawatamies by night.

But the night did not bring them, nor the next morning, nor the next day, nor yet the day following.

And in the waiting days I lived in four camps of savages, and it was my duty to cover them with the robe of peace.

The wolf-eyed Sacs, the stately Winnebagoes, the Chippewas, and Malhominis, — they sat like gamecocks, quiet, but alert for a ruffle of one another's plumage. In council they were men; in idleness, children. When I was with them, they talked of war and spoke like senators. When I turned my back they gambled, lied, bragged, and stole. I needed four bodies and uncounted minds.

And I saw how my union was composed. The tribes would unite and destroy the Senecas, — that done, it was probable they would find the game merry, and fall upon one another.

With every hour of delay they grew harder to control. There was jealousy between the war chiefs. I stepped on thin ice in my walks from lodge to lodge.

But the third day brought Cadillac. We saw the blur of his canoes far to the north, and when they came within earshot we were ranged to receive them.

A man should know pride in his achievement, — else why is striving given him? I looked over my warriors, rank on rank. Fierce-eyed, muscled like panthers, they were terrible engines of war. And I controlled them! I felt the lift of the heart that strengthens a man's will. That

is something rarer than pride; a flitting vision of the unsounded depths of human power.

And the canoes that approached made a strange pageant. I could not in a moment rid myself of a rooted custom; I wished the woman were there to see. French and Indians sat side by side, so that blankets rubbed uniforms. They were packed in close bending ranks, their bodies crouching to the paddles, their eyes upon the shore. There were ferret-sharp black eyes and peasant-dull blue ones, but all were glittering. And the faces, bronze or white, took on the same look, — they were strained, arid of all expression but the fever for war. A slow tingle crawled over me, and I saw the crowd sway. A cautious, muffled cry broke from the shore and was answered from the canoes. It was a hoarse note, for the lust for blood crowds the throat full.

I looked to see Cadillac riding a surge of triumph, but when our hands met I was chilled. He showed no gladness. His purple face had lines, and he looked hot and jaded. Had his men failed him? No, I reviewed them. French, Hurons, and Ottawas, they made a goodly showing. Onanguissé was there, and his Pottawatamies, oiled, feathered, and paint-decked, were beautiful as catamounts. All was well. Cadillac was not in his first youth, and had abused himself. His look meant fatigue.

"Ottawas, Hurons, Pottawatamies, Malhominis, Chippewas, Sacs, Winnebagoes." I counted them off to him. "Monsieur de la Mothe-Cadillac, it is a sight worthy your eyes. New France has not seen such a gathering since the day when Saint Lusson-planted our standard at the straits and fourteen tribes looked on."

He nodded heavily. "The Senecas are still in camp?"

"Yes, monsieur. We can attack to-night."

But he turned away. "Montlivet, your wife is in the Seneca camp."

I looked at him coldly, I think, though I remember that I clutched his shoulder.

"Monsieur, you mistake. My wife went east."

He tried to draw me aside, but I resisted him stolidly. I eyed him searchingly, angrily, but he could not look at me. "Listen," he begged, and he spoke very slowly and tapped my arm. Yet I was understanding him perfectly. "Listen, Montlivet, there is no mistake. When Father Carheil told me that there were Hurons in Starling's escort I sent Ottawas in pursuit. I have heard from them. Starling's party went east till they were out of sight of the garrison. Then they turned west and joined Pemaou. It was by Starling's direction. The Ottawas would have objected, for I had ordered them to travel east, but they were overpowered. It is supposed, since

they traveled in this direction, that they went to the Seneca camp. But that may not be true."

"It is undoubtedly true," I said.

Cadillac pushed me out of earshot of the men. "Montlivet, you cannot understand. Listen to me."

I tried to shake him away. "There is nothing more that you can say. Monsieur, unhand me. My wife left with Starling. She is undoubtedly in the Seneca camp. Pemaou and Starling are in league, and they go to the Senecas because they hope to make terms on behalf of the English with the western tribes. I understand."

Cadillac looked at me fully, and I realized dully that his face grew white as he examined mine. "Go away. Go at once," he urged. "Leave things here to me."

I nodded and stumbled away. Stretched tarpaulins made my tent, and I crawled under them, drew down the folds, and was alone. The noise of the camp muttered around me like a wind.

And then I lay alone with myself and my beliefs, and fought to know where my feet were set. There was tempest without my tent, but not within. In the valleys where I struggled there was great quiet. And at last I found certainty.

In an hour I went to find Cadillac. He would not let me speak.

"Montlivet, we will stop this attack — if we can hold the Indians."

"It is not possible to hold the Indians. They are blood drunk. We should have general massacre."

"Then you must leave. You can go with Onanguissé. He says that if his adopted daughter is with the Senecas he will not join in the attack."

"No, I shall not go with him. I shall lead the allied force of Indians, monsieur."

Cadillac looked me over. I saw, with my own face cold, that his was not steady.

"No victory is worth that," I heard him say, and I listened as if he spoke of another's sorrow. "It is not necessary, Montlivet."

"It is absolutely necessary. The war chiefs are jealous. Without a leader they will fall on one another and we shall have sickening massacre. You cannot lead them, for you do not speak their language."

"But even granting that" —

I touched his sleeve. "Monsieur, I have been alone. I have thought it out. There is no escape. I do not know why life should give a man such a thing to do, but it is here. I have told the Indians that I represented the king; that I stood for government, protection. I have called them here in the name of law. It is a new word to them, and I have forced its meaning into their

minds. And so they trust me. They trust me in the name of this law I talk about. If I desert them now, they will lapse into savagery of the worst kind. We shall have anarchy. Blood will flow for years. No Frenchman's life will be safe. I have the best men of six tribes here, and they will think themselves deceived and pay us in red coin. I have been alone. I have thought it out. I cannot do wholesale murder to save one life, even if it is my wife whose life is to be forfeit. We must go on."

Cadillac put out his hand and caught my shoulder. I had reeled against him as I spoke. He removed his hat.

"I await your plans, Monsieur de Montlivet. My troops are ready."

When I found Onanguissé he examined me from under drooping lids. Despite his age, he was wont to hold his head like a deer, but now his look was on the ground. He handed me a richly feathered bow and a sheaf of arrows.

"I cannot use them," he said. "I called her daughter. I gave her a robe in token. It is only a porcupine who turns against his own. A chief remembers."

I pressed the bow back. "Take it, and save her. I do not know how. You are an old man in knowledge, I am a child. I trust to you to bring her to me."

He looked up at that, and shook his head in sorrow when he saw my face. But he would not take his bow. "One man cannot save her," he said, and he bowed his head again and went away.

I did not speak. I saw him summon his warriors and reëmbark. In the general tumult his leaving made little stir. The Pottawatamies were arrogant, called themselves "lords," and exacted tribute of the other tribes of La Baye. Yet they accomplished this more by diplomacy than warfare. I knew that Onanguissé's desertion was well in tune with his reputation and would not be combated.

I found Pierre, and told him about the woman. "You are to save her. You are to get her away. It is for you to do. You are to think nothing else, work for nothing else. You can do it. I depend on you to do it. You are never to come to me again if you fail."

But he, too, looked away. "It cannot be done. The Indians will kill her." He turned his head from me, and his voice was thick and grating.

I raged at him. "I shall give the Indians orders to spare all women," I declared.

He nodded his great head. "I will help the master. I will do all I can." He humored me as one hushes an ailing child, but I saw the caution and blankness in his look. As soon as he could he slipped out of my sight.

And then I went to work. If I staggered as I made my stumbling, blinded way from war chief to war chief, there was none to know, for blood lust had closed eyes and ears. Yet, though my muscles failed, my brain was clear.

The kettle-drums snarled and buzzed like lazy hornets. They sounded spiteful rather than wicked, but I knew what their droning stood for, and my body grew cold. In the Ottawa camp the drummers sat beside a post in the centre of a great circle of warriors, and Longuant stood with them in the ring singing a war chant. His body was painted green and he was hung with chains of wampum. I halted. He was one of the sanest, the most admirable, of the war chiefs, and I listened to him. He kept his eyes fixed on the westering sun, and yelped his recitation in a sharp, barking voice. I heard of children dashed to death against trees; of men disemboweled and left to the mercy of dogs and flies. After the recitation of each exploit, he struck his hatchet against the post, and the clamor of the drums doubled.

I found myself sick as well as faint. I beat the air with my clenched fist, and Cadillac saw me, and begged me to go away alone till I had myself in hand. But I pushed by him.

"My mind is clear," I said, and I spoke as coldly as a machine. "Clearer than yours, for I

see this as it is. Let me go. I have undertaken this and I shall go through."

We were ready to march an hour before sunset. The fifty Sacs formed the vanguard, and I was with them. The Winnebagoes followed, then the French troops. The remaining tribes, and the Indians who carried the stores, brought up the rear. Our intention was to march as quietly as possible while daylight lasted, then work our way by dark and starlight till we were near the Seneca camp. We would then drop on the ground, and lie in ambush till it grew light enough to attack. We hoped to surprise the camp. They had fortified themselves, but apparently had no scouts at work, and from all we could learn they were feasting and drinking in Babylonish security, celebrating the return of their messengers from Michillimackinac. With that exploit in mind it was small wonder that they felt arrogant and unassailable. Now was indeed our time.

Our ranks were formed, and I looked them over man by man. Each savage carried a bag with ten pounds of maize flour, a light covering, a bow and arrows, or a fusee. The Winnebagoes I had put well in the lead, for they were protected by great shields of dried buffalo skin. I tried one of the skin shields and found it like iron. It would turn a hatchet.

Cadillac's bugler sounded the call and we started. The late sun was unclouded and warm, and the smell of paint and breath and unwashed bodies filled my lungs. The stench was hot and brutish in my nostrils, and it was the smell of war.

So long as daylight lasted we moved with some regularity in spite of the rough ground. Then, knowing we were drawing nearer the Senecas, we began to slip from tree to tree. The Indians did this like phantoms, and the French troops imitated. Three hundred men went through the forest, and sometimes a twig cracked. There was no other sound. We went for some time. We heard owls hoot around us, and knew they might be watch cries. Still we went on. We went till I felt the ground rise steadily under my groping feet. The Seneca stronghold was on an eminence. I gave the signal to drop where we were and wait for day.

We melted into the shadows, and lay rigid while the stars looked down. The savage next me slept. His war club lay by his side and I felt of it in the dark. It was made of a deer's horn, shaped like a cutlass; it had a large ball at the end. The ball was heavy and jagged, and would crush a skull.

There were hundreds of such clubs. In a few hours they would be in use. And the woman was in camp.

My right arm was free from the sling and I dug my hands together. I could feel the blood running in my palms, and I checked myself. If I injured my hands how could I save the woman?

But nothing could save the woman.

I had given commands to spare all whites and to torture no one. But Pierre was right. I was a fool to have pretended, even to myself, that I thought the savages listened.

A fool can do harm enough, but a cowardly, soft-hearted man is the most dangerous of knaves. I might have killed Pemaou when I threw the spear at him; I might have killed him the night before my wedding in the Pottawatamie camp. I had withheld my hand because it was disagreeable to me to kill. And now the woman's life was to pay the forfeit of my lax softness. I rolled in my agony, and bit the ground till my mouth was full of leaf mould.

A planet swung from one tree-top to the next. What lay behind it? She would know soon. But I could not follow her where she was going. I should live. I knew that. When Death is courted he will not strike. I had seen that in battle.

That first morning when she had come to me with the sunrise, — when she had drifted to me, bound and singing, — I had called to her to have no fear, that no harm should come to her. And she had trusted me.

She had a little hollow in her brown throat where I had watched the breath flutter. I had never touched it.

I could thank God for her, for one thing. She had refused my kiss.

I saw the planet again, tipping another tree-top. I understood its remoteness; in my agony I was part of it. What were men, countries, empires! I felt the insignificance of life, of suffering. What did it matter if these Indians died! Why should we not all die? I crawled to my knees. I would give the signal to retreat. I would give it now. Let the massacre come.

But I fell back. I could not. I could not. Three hundred lives for one life. I could spill my own blood for her, but not theirs.

But as for empire, I had forgotten its meaning.

All of these men lying in the shadows had women who were dear. Many of the wives would kill themselves if their husbands died. I had seen an Indian wife do it; she had smiled while she was dying.

Would the woman think of me — at the last? She would not know that I had failed her. She would not know that I was worse than Starling.

She was the highest-couraged, the most finely wrought woman that the world knew. Yet two men had failed her.

"Monsieur," she had said, "life has not been so pleasant that I should wish to live."

It was only a week ago that she — she, alive, untouched, my own — had walked away from me in the sunshine, leaning on Cadillac's arm. And I had let her go. And I had let her go.

And I had let her go. I said that over and over, with my mouth dry, and I forgot time. I did not know that minutes were passing, but I looked up, and the stars were dim, and branches and twigs were taking form. Day would be on us soon.

I raised myself on my elbow and peered. I could see very little, but I could hear the strange rhythmic rustle that I call the breathing of the forest. And with it mingled the breathing of three hundred warriors. They carried clubs, arrows, muskets. I was to give them the signal for war.

I tried to rise. I was up on my knees. I fell back. I tried again. My muscles did not obey. I saw the war club of the Indian beside me. My hands stole out to it. A blow on my own head would end matters. My hands closed on the handle of the club.

Then the savage next me stirred. That roused me. The insanity was over, and sweat rained from me at realization of my weakness, — the weakness that always traps a man unsure of his values, his judgment. When men say that a

man's life is not his own to take, I am not sure. But that had nothing to do with me now. I was not a man in the sense of having a man's free volition. When I had given up human claims for myself, I had ceased to exist as an independent agent. It was only by knowing that I was a tool that I could keep myself alive.

And so I sat upon my knees and whispered to the Indians about me. They whispered in turn, and soon three hundred men were waked and ready.

Yet the forest scarcely rustled.

I motioned, and the line started. We crept some twenty paces from tree to tree. Then ahead of us I saw an opening. I could distinguish the outlines of a rough redoubt.

I stepped in front and stopped a moment. It had grown light enough for me to see the faces of the Sac warriors. Dirt-crusted, red-eyed, wolfish, they awaited my signal.

I raised my sword. "Ready!" I called.

An inferno of yells arose. We ran at the top of our speed. We charged the stake-built redoubt with knives in hands. Mingled with our war cry I heard the screams of the awakening camp.

I reached the palings. They were of bass wood, roughly split and tough. I could not scale them with my lame shoulder. I seized a hatchet from an Indian, struck the stakes, wrenched one free, and climbed through the hole.

The camp was in an uproar. A few Sacs had scaled the redoubt ahead of me, and one of them was grappling with a Seneca just in my path. I dodged them and ran on. Behind me I heard the terrible roar of the blood-hungry army.

I fought my way on. Warriors and slaves rose before me and screamed at my knife, and at something that was in my face. I did not touch them. I had to find the woman. She might be hiding in one of the huts. But there were many bark huts, and all alike. I ran on.

The air was thickening with powder smoke, and the taste of blood was in my throat. A hatchet whistled by me and cut the cloth from my shoulder. I saw the Seneca who threw the hatchet, but I would not stop. Corpses were in my way. Twice I slipped in blood and went to my knees.

I must search each lodge, each group. I had seen nothing that looked like a woman.

An Indian grappled with me, and I slashed at him till he was helpless. I was covered with blood that was not my own. I let him drop and stumbled on.

I could not find the woman. I had not seen Starling nor Pierre nor Labarthe nor Leclerc.

And over all the noise of tearing flesh and the screams of dying men came the sound of singing, of constant, exultant singing, — the singing of

victors binding their captives; the death songs of wounded preparing to die.

I saw two bodies lying together as if the same arrow had cleft them. Their hands sprawled toward me, red and beckoning. They were mutilated, but I knew their clothes. They were Leclerc and Labarthe. Leclerc was hanging on Labarthe as he had leaned in life.

I had brought these men to the wilderness. And Simon was dead, too. I went on.

I saw a Seneca, stripped and running blood, crouch to a white man on the ground and lift his knife to take the scalp. I sprang upon him, but he dashed my knife away, found his feet, and pressed at me. I dodged his hatchet, and catching up a skin shield from the ground turned on him. I was taller than he, and I smashed the shield down on his head so that he dropped. I pounded him till he was beyond doing harm to any one, then I took his knife and hatchet, tossed him aside, and turned to the white man.

It was Starling, and there was life in him, for he opened his eyes.

I took my flask and forced brandy between his teeth. He recognized me but could not speak. A great spear had torn through his chest. I started to pull it out, but when I looked farther and saw what a hatchet had done I checked myself.

His eyes were on mine and he tried to speak. It was more than I could look at, — his effort to hold life in his torn body and tell me something. I eased his head and gave him more brandy.

And then he found strength to try to push me away. "Go! Go! The woman!" I made the words out of the writhing of his lips.

I leaned over him. "Where? Where is she? Where?"

He tried many times before he made a sound that I could catch, and his strength ebbed. I tried more brandy, but he was past reviving. I strained to hear, till my agony matched his.

I thought I caught a word. "Woods!" I cried. "Is she in the woods?"

"Yes." He suddenly spoke clearly. "Go." And he fell back in my arms.

I thought that he died with that word, but I held him a moment longer to make sure. It did not matter now that I hated him. As to what he had brought on me, — I could not visit my despair on him for that. As well rage at the forces that made him. Life had given him a little soul in a compelling body. The world believed the body, and expected of the man what he could not reach. I looked at his dead face and trembled before the mystery of inheritance.

But he was not dead. He opened his eyes to mine, quivered, and spoke, and his voice was clear.

"I would have followed her into the woods but they bound me. I was not a coward that time. I would have followed her."

And then the end came to him in a way that I could not mistake, for with the last struggle he cried to the woman.

I laid him down. While I had held him I had known that Frenchmen were fighting around me, and my neck was slimy with warm blood, for an arrow had nicked my ear. But the battle had swayed on to the north of the camp, and only dead and dying were left in sight. I looked at Starling. I could not carry him. I took off my coat, covered the body, and went on.

The woman had gone to the woods. She had gone to the woods.

But woods lay on every side.

As I ran through the camp toward the north I saw a woman ahead of me. She had a broad, fat figure, and I knew she was an Indian. But she was a woman and the first that I had seen. I caught her and jerked her around to face me.

"The woman? The white woman? Where is she?" I used the Illinois speech.

The woman was a Miami slave and apparently unhurt. But as I stood over her a line of foam bubbled out of her blue lips. Her eyes were meaningless. I had frightened her into catalepsy, and I ground my teeth at my ill luck,

for she could have told me something of the woman. I took my brandy flask and tried to pry her teeth apart.

Both of my hands were busy with her when Pierre's bellow rose from behind me. "Master! Jump! Jump!" In the same instant I heard breathing close upon me.

I jumped. As I did it I heard the crash of a hatchet through bone, and the pounding of a great body heaving down upon its knees. I turned.

Pemaou's hatchet was in Pierre's brain, and my giant, my man who had lived with me, was crumpled down on hands and knees, looking at me and dying.

I called out like a mad thing, and insanity gave me power. I tore the red hatchet from Pemaou's hands and pinioned him. My fingers dug into his throat, and I threw him to the ground. He bared his wolf's teeth and began his death song.

But I raved at him, and choked him to silence.

"You are not to die now!" I shouted at his glazing eyes. "You shall live. I shall torture you. You shall live to be tortured."

I carried rope around my waist, and I took it and bound him. How I did it is not clear, for I had a weak shoulder and he was muscular. But now he seemed palsied and I a giant. It was done. I bound him till he was rigid and helpless.

And then I fell to my knees beside Pierre. He

was dead. I had lost even the parting from him. My giant was dead. He had taken the blow meant for me.

Pierre was dead, and Simon and Labarthe and Leclerc. I had brought them to the wilderness because I believed in a western empire for France. I left Pierre and went on.

But I had not gone far when a cry rose behind me. It was louder than the calls of the dying. It was the wail of an Indian woman for her dead. I ran back. Singing Arrow lay stretched on Pierre's body.

I looked at her. I did not ask myself how she came there, though I had thought her safe in the Malhominis village. So she had loved the man enough to follow secretly. I left her with him and went on.

I stepped over men who were mangled and scalped. Some of them were not dead, and they clutched at me. But I went on my way.

Indians and troops were gathered at the north of the camp. The warfare was over. Corpses were stacked like logs, and the savages were binding their captives and chanting of their victories. The French stood together, leaning on their muskets. I saw Cadillac unhurt, and went to him.

"Is the bugler alive? Have him sound the call."

The commandant turned at sound of my voice. He was elated and would have embraced me, but seeing my face his mood altered. He gave the order.

The bugle restored quiet, and I raised my sword for attention. I asked each tribe in turn if they had seen a white woman. Then I asked the French. I gained only a storm of negatives.

I went on with the orders to the tribes. All captives were to be treated kindly and their wounds dressed. This was because they were to be adopted, and it was prudent to keep them in good condition. The argument might restrain the savages. I was not sure.

And all the time that I was speaking I wondered if I looked and talked as other men did. Would the savages obey me as they had done when I was a live, breathing force, full of ardor and belief? They seemed to see no difference. I finished my talk to them and turned to Cadillac.

"You do not need me now. You will be occupied caring for the wounded and burying the dead. The Indians will not attempt torture to-day. I am going to the woods."

"To the woods?"

"The woman is in the woods. She must have gone at the first alarm. I cannot find her here."

"Ask the captives. They will know."

"It is useless to ask them. They will not

speak now. It is a code. I am going to the woods. Send what soldiers you can to search with me."

"Shall I send Indians with you, too?"

"Not now. They are useless now. They could trail nothing. Let me go."

He followed like a father. "You will come back?"

"Yes, I will come back."

But I had three things to do before I was free to go to the woods. To go to the woods where I would find the woman.

I searched for the Miami slave woman. She was dead. That cut my last hope of news.

I saw that Pemaou was still well bound, and I had him carried into a hut to await my orders.

I went to Pierre's body. Singing Arrow still wailed beside it, and cried out that it should not be moved. I told her the soldiers would obey her orders, and carry it where she wished.

But there was a fourth matter. I spoke to Dubisson, and my tongue was furry and cold.

"See that watch is kept on the bags of scalps for European hair."

Then I went to the woods.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE UNDESERVED

THERE were birds in the woods, and soft breezes. Squirrels chattered at me, and I saw flowers. And sometimes I saw blood on trampled moss where fugitives had been before.

I called, and fired my arquebus. I whistled, for that sound carried far. Since that day the sound of a whistle is terrible to me. It means despair.

Soldiers, grave-faced, respectful, followed me. They were faint for food, and sore and sick from warfare, but they came with me without protest. They gave me the deference we show a mourner in a house of death. I turned to them in a rage.

"Make more noise. Laugh. Talk. Be natural. I command you."

We divided the woods among us, like game-beaters in a thicket, and went over the ground foot by foot. We found nothing. The birds sang and the sun went higher. Though the woods were pure and clean I could smell blood everywhere. In time a man dropped from exhaustion. At that I gave the word to go back to camp.

The camp itself was less terrible than the memories that had been with me as I walked through the unsullied woods. The wounded were cared for and the dead buried. The Indians were gathered around their separate fires, chanting, feeding, bragging, and sleeping. The French had made a camp at one side, and they, too, were seeking comfort through food and sleep. Life was progressing as if the mutilated dead had never been.

We had succeeded, Cadillac assured me. All the Senecas were dead or captured and our total loss, French and savage, was only seventy-five men. We had but few wounded, and the surgeon said they would recover.

I nodded, took food, and went alone to eat. I sat there a long time. Cadillac came toward me once as if to speak, but looked at me and turned away.

At last I had made up my mind, and I went to the hut where I had left Pemaou. It had taken time to fight down my longing for even combat with him, but I knew that I must not risk that, for I needed to keep my life for a time. So I would try for speech with him first, and then he should die. And since he must die helpless, he must die as painlessly as possible. Physical revenge had become abominable to me. It was inadequate.

I entered the hut. Pemaou's figure lay, face downward, on the floor. It had a rigidity that did not come from the thongs that bound it. I turned it over. The Indian's throat was cut. Life had flowed out of the red, horrible opening.

I think that I cursed at the dead man. Corpse that he was, he had tricked me again, for I had hoped, against reason, to force information from him. Death had not dignified his wolfish face. He had died, as he had lived, a snarling animal, whose sagacity was that of the brute. And I had lost with him this time, as I had lost before, by taking thought, and so losing time. An animal does not hesitate, and he is a fool who deliberates in dealing with him. I tasted desolation as I stood there.

A moccasin stepped behind me. "I killed him," said Singing Arrow's voice.

I turned. She was terrible to look at. Life had given this savage woman strength of will and soul without training to balance it. She was Nemesis incarnate. Yet blood-stained and tragic as was her face, her words were calm.

"He killed my man."

What was there to say? It was only her look that showed she had been through tempests; in mind she seemed as numbed as I. I took her by the arm and led her outside. I turned away from the blood-soaked camp, and took her to the beach

where the water was yellow-white and rippled on the sand. I motioned her to wash away the blood stains on her face and arms. Then I spoke.

"Singing Arrow, do you intend to kill yourself and follow Pierre?"

She drew her blanket high and folded her arms. "Yes, if he calls me. When I dream of him twice I shall know that he is crying for me and cannot rest, so I shall go after him. I have dreamed once already, — after I killed the Huron. When I dream once more I can go."

I touched her arm. "Look at me. Singing Arrow, Pierre is not calling you to follow him. He is calling you to pick up his work where he had to drop it. He died trying to save me. He wants you to help me now. My wife is in the woods. You are to help me find her. Will you help me, Singing Arrow?"

She shook her head. As she looked at me, scornful and sorrowful and absolutely unmoved, she was one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen. I knew this remotely, as an unblest ghost might know a warmth he could not feel.

"You do not need me. If your whisper cannot reach the white woman she would not hear my shouts. I must go with my man."

"Singing Arrow, the Great Spirit is not ready for you. When he is ready he will send. You must wait for him to send."

She did not shift her look from me. "Your Great Spirit is strange. He tells you that you are brave men and good when you take other lives, but he will not let you take your own. Why should you have power over other men's bodies if your own does not belong to you? Your Great Spirit may be right for you white men, but for me he speaks like a child. When my man calls me I shall go." She dropped her eyes, wrapped her blanket closer, and went away. I did not follow her. She had as sound a right to her belief as I to mine.

And what was my belief?

The sun was at the horizon, and I went to Cadillac. "You hold council to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow morning."

"I shall be here."

"But where are you going now?"

"To the woods."

Cadillac took me by the arm. "Montlivet, be sane!"

But I think that as he looked at me he saw that I was sane. "I shall be with you in the morning," I promised. And I would have no further words.

All that night in the woods, both waking and dreaming, the thought of the woman was like a presence near me. I slept some, dropping against trees, then roused and stumbled on. I

do not know that I consciously searched for her, but I went on and on to meet her. It seemed that I should always do that while I lived, — should always push my way forward, feeling that beyond the next turn she stood beckoning.

The stars rose and set. There were multitudes of them and very bright. If man could only have his orbit fixed and follow it as they did; be compelled to follow it by a governing power! The terrible cruelty of a God who throws volition into a man's hands without giving him understanding to handle it came to me for the first time.

When day arrived I ate a portion of meal and meat, and made my way back. It was a long trip, for I had wandered far, and when I reached the camp the sun was three hours high. A large tent had been made of skins and tarpaulins, and French and savages were gathered there and waiting. I was late. The calumet was already passing as I went in.

I halted a moment at the entrance. There was no cheer of welcome at sight of me. Instead there was a hush, — the hush of suspended breathing. In two days these savages had come to draw aside from me for what was in my look. "His face is the face of one dead," Outchipouac had said. I knew that I had grown to seem abnormal, alien. I tried to form my expression

to better lines, but it was out of my power. I took my place as interpreter, and the long conclave opened.

The hours of droning speeches went on and on. Each tribe presented its claims, and metaphor shouldered metaphor. It sounded trivial as the bragging of blue-jays, but I interpreted carefully and kept the different headings in mind. Then I asked Cadillac's permission, and took it on myself to answer.

Sometimes the Power that rules us, and that shoves us here and there to play our parts in the game, seems to me nothing but a cold-eyed justice, remote, indifferent, impartially judicial. So I felt now. In looking at the issue I saw that meaning and vitality had gone from my spirit, but I had kept equity. I parceled the spoil among the tribes, and did it without doubt of my judgment or care for its acceptance. I remembered Outchipouac's plea for his people, and found it just. The Malhominis had sent the largest force in proportion to the strength of their tribe, and their position on the bay was strategical. So I gave them their choice of a third of the captives. To the remaining tribes I gave the rest of the captives and the confiscated weapons. Then I passed the calumet among them.

I had spoken coldly, as an onlooker. Perhaps my air of detachment gave me authority.

The chiefs smoked the calumet and ratified my words. That part of the council was over.

And then to the future. Cadillac rose. His eloquence painted the prospect till it shimmered like a dream landscape, rose-tinted, iridescent, with sparkling vistas full of music and bugle calls and the tramp of marching men with the sun in their faces. We, French and Indians, were a united people. Our young men were brave and full of vigor. We should sweep all before us. We should crush the Iroquois and drive the English far away over seas. We should go now to Michillimackinac and march from there to conquest and empire. All the bubble dreams of sovereignty, from Nineveh on, glittered in his words. I translated faithfully.

Outchipouac answered. I had somehow won his spirit, which was brave and vigorous. Perhaps he repented his distrust of me. My silver chain was on his neck, and he fingered it. He said that where I led the Malhominis would follow. His wild imagery swept like the torrent of an epic. The man was warrior, dreamer, fatalist. He called on the chiefs of the tribes to witness what I was, what I had done. Water could not drown me, arrows could not harm me. I wore the French garb and my face was white, but I was something more universal than any race. I spoke all tongues. I was like the air

which belonged to French and Indian alike. I was a manitou; I had been sent to lead the Indians back to the supremacy that they had almost lost.

I could believe him as I listened. I did not remember that he spoke of me. He was talking of some great principle, some crystallization of the forces of the woods in man's shape. The woods that had nurtured the Indian should protect him. At last, out from the woods had come this spirit, — this spirit that was their voice. He did not talk to me, he talked to the skies and the clouds and the forces that dwelt in them. It was the call of a savage king to the soul of the wild earth that had cradled him.

So swept away was I that I could not have translated. But it was not necessary. He had spoken in Algonquin, which all but the French and Hurons understood. The war chiefs rose. It is strange. An Indian may scalp and torture, yet have at heart much of the seer and poet. The chiefs came forward and laid their bows and quivers full of arrows at my feet.

For a moment Outchipouac's speech had warmed me as I thought I might not be warm again. But when I saw the chiefs advancing I became stone.

"I cannot lead you," I said in Algonquin, and I knew my voice was blank. "Outchipouac is wrong. I am no manitou, but a man so weak he

does not know the truth even for himself. How can he lead others? When I brought you here the sun shone brightly, and I thought I saw the way ahead. Now I am in darkness and mist. Go. Leave me. Find a leader whose sight is not clouded." I turned my back and stood with my head down.

A murmur rose. I had broken the illusion. We had all been riding the clouds of fancy, and I had dashed us to earth again. The chiefs had come to me with their hands out, and I had thrown water in their faces. They had reason for their anger. Cadillac saw the pantomime and lumbered from his seat. He seized my arm.

"Montlivet, you are insane! You are insane!"

I pointed him to the woods. "Monsieur, I have dropped my sword. I shall go into the forest for a time."

He shook me as if I were in a torpor. "Your wife" —

"I shall search for her. I am going out now with Indian trailers. I shall not leave this country till all hope is past, — then I shall go west."

For a moment suspicion clutched him. "Oh, you would form your union without me! You are planning a dictatorship."

I took him by the arm and begged him to understand. "I have dropped my sword," I

reiterated. "I am going on alone. I have skins and provisions cached at Sturgeon Cove — enough for barter. I am not insane. I shall go prudently. There are lands and peoples to be explored in the west."

The clamor grew. Dubisson and others of the French came nearer.

"Speak to the chiefs now. Speak to them now," they begged. "You can save the situation yet."

I watched the Indians. "They are departing peacefully."

"But they are departing!"

I looked at Cadillac. "And why not?"

He drew his sword. "Montlivet, have you turned priest — or coward? Do you dare to try and tell me that war is wrong?"

I looked at him, and left my own sword untouched. "I do not know what I believe. I am going back in the woods. Perhaps I shall learn. But now we have done all that we set out to do. We have destroyed the Seneca war party. We shall be safe from the Iroquois for some time."

"But we are just ready to go on. Our men are ready."

His words seemed meaningless. "Ready! Are intoxicated men ready? We have drunk blood. Now we are drunk with words. I will not" —

A roar outside cut my words short. "The woman! The woman!" I heard the cry in several languages at once, but I could not comprehend it. I saw the crowd rise and surge toward me, making for the entrance of the tent. I turned and ran with them. Yet my mind was numb.

We reached the outside. I was in advance. A great canoe was at the shore and Onanguissé was directing his oarsmen. In the bow of the canoe sat the woman.

I reached her first; I caught her from the canoe. Yes, she was alive; she was unhurt. Her hands were warm. I heard her breathe. I dropped on my knees at her feet.

And then she bent over me and whispered, "Monsieur, monsieur, you are unhurt!" Her voice had all its old inflections, and I rose and looked at her in wonder. Yes, she was alive. She was grave-eyed and haggard, but she was alive. The hands that I held were warm and trembling, though my own were cold and leaden as my palsied tongue. She was dressed in skins, and I could see the brown hollow in her throat. I could not speak. I laid my lips upon her hand and trembled.

French and savages pressed around us in a gaping, silent ring. Cadillac had given us the moment together, but he edged nearer, bewildered by my silence.

"Madame, we welcome you," he cried. "Your husband has not been like himself since he heard of your danger. Give him time to recover. We have been a camp of mourning for you. Tell us of your escape."

And then I spoke. I drew her hand through my arm and turned her to face the crowd. "They are your friends, madame," I said, as if it were the conclusion of a long talk between us. "Thank them, and tell them of your escape."

But she halted and turned again to me. She looked up with her face close to mine, and for the first time she met my eyes fully. We stood so a moment, and as she stood she flushed under what was in my look; a wave of deepening pink crept slowly up through her brown pallor, but she did not look away. I felt my face harden to iron. It was I who turned from her, and the faces before me swam in red. Up to that time I had grasped only the fact that she was alive, that she stood there, warm, beautiful, unscathed, that I could see her, touch her, hear the strange rise and fall of her voice. But with the clinging of her glance to mine I remembered more, and sweat poured out on my forehead. She was my wife. I had forfeited the right to touch her hand.

The French began to murmur questions and she turned back toward them. She stood close by my side with her hand in mine, and looked

into the faces, French and savage, that hemmed her round. I think she saw tears in some eyes, for her voice suddenly faltered. She made a gesture of courtesy and greeting.

"I escaped days ago when we were traveling," she said in her slow-moving French, that all around might hear. "I made my way to the Pottawatamie Islands. Onanguissé had called me daughter, and I knew that if I could find his people I was safe."

The crowd breathed together in one exclamation. "You have not been in this camp at all?"

I felt her draw closer to me. "No, I have not been in this camp. You thought that I was here?" Her grasp on my hand tightened. "Then this is the Seneca camp. The battle is over," she said under her breath, and she turned to me. Her eyes were brave, but I knew from her trembling lips that she understood. "Where is my cousin?"

I took both her hands in mine. "He died in my arms. He died trying to send me to you. He forgot self. It was the death of a brave man, madame."

She stood and looked at me. She had forgotten the men around her. "Monsieur," she said, and this time her eyes were soft with tears, "my cousin was not so bad as he seemed. He could not help being what he was."

"I understand."

"Monsieur, you conquered the Senecas?"

"Yes. We will forget it, madame."

She looked over the heads of the lines of soldiers and grew white to the lips. I knew that she saw rows of scalps, and I could not save her from it. Yet I implored.

"Do not think of it. It is all over, madame."

Her eyes came back to me. "And Pierre? Is Pierre safe?"

"Madame, he — He died saving me."

Her hands grasped me harder. "And Labarthe?"

"I am all that is left, madame."

Still she held to me. "Where is Singing Arrow?"

I looked at Cadillac. He shook his head. "They found the Indian woman this morning," he said. "She was dead beside her husband. Do not grieve for her. Her face is more than happy; it is triumphant. My men called me to look. Will you see her now, madame?"

But she could not answer. The hands that held mine began to chill, and I saw the brown throat quiver. I turned to Cadillac. "I have no tent. May I take madame to yours?"

He placed all that he had at her service. He was moved, for he did it with scant phrase.

"But one moment," he begged. "Montlivet,

one word with your wife first. Madame, I beg you to listen. Will you look around you here?"

She stopped. "I have looked, monsieur."

"Madame, you see those Indians. They are war chiefs and picked braves. The brawn and brain of six tribes are collected here before you. Do you know what that means?"

I saw her look at him gravely. "I should understand. I have lived in Indian camps, monsieur."

He looked back at her with sudden admiration that crowded the calculation out of his eyes. "Madame!" he exclaimed. "We know your spirit and knowledge; we wish that you could teach us some new way to show you homage. But do you understand your husband's power? You have never seen him in the field. Look at these war chiefs. They are arrogant and untamed, but they follow your husband like parish-school children. It is marvelous, madame."

She lifted her long deer's throat, and I felt her thrill. "Monsieur, I think that not even you can know half what I do of my husband's strength and power."

Her words were knives. I would have drawn her away, but Cadillac was before me. "Wait, Montlivet, wait! This is my time. I have more to say. Then, madame, to the point. These chiefs that you see are leaving. They would

have been gone now if you had not come. They are leaving us because your husband said he would not lead them further. Talk to him. I can hold the tribes here a few hours longer. If he comes back to sanity by night, there will still be time for him to undo his folly. Talk to him, madame."

Again I tried to interrupt, but the pressure of her hand begged me to be silent. "What would you have me say to my husband?" she asked Cadillac, and she stood close to me with her head high.

He drove his fists together. "I would have you bring him to reason," he groaned. "For three days he has lived in a trance. He planned the attack, and led it without a quiver, but since then he has tried to wash his hands of us and of the whole affair. It is a crucial time, and he is acting like a madman. His anxiety about you has unbalanced him. Bring him to reason, madame."

I saw her steal a glance at me as a girl might at her lover, and there was a strange, fierce pride in her look. She bowed to Cadillac. "I am glad you told me this, monsieur." Then she turned to me. "Shall we go?"

But I looked over her head at the commandant. "It will be useless to keep the tribes in waiting," I warned.

I went to Onanguissé, the woman on my arm. "My heart is at your feet," I said to him. "My blood belongs to you, and my sword!"

He looked at the woman and at me, and he spoke thoughtfully. "When I found her in my lodge we had no speech in common, but I understood. I brought her to you. Now keep what you have. The best fisherman may let a fish slip once from his net by accident, but his wits are fat if he lets it go a second time."

I knew he was troubled. He saw no possession in my face, and he thought me weak.

And then I took the woman to Cadillac's tent.

CHAPTER XXXII

I TELL THE WOMAN

CADILLAC's tent held a couch of brush covered with skins, and I led the woman to it and bade her sit. Then I moved away and stood by the rough table.

"Madame," I said, "I have something that I must tell you. I" —

She rose from the couch and came toward me. "Will you wait?" she interrupted. "May I speak first?" She stood beside me, and I saw how thin her hand was as it rested on the table. She had been through danger, starvation. I found myself shaking.

"You went alone through the woods!" I cried, and my voice was hoarse, so that I had to stop and control it. "Did you suffer? You must have suffered, madame?"

She smiled up at me. "Monsieur, do not grieve. It is all over. And the greatest suffering was in my mind. I feared that you would think I disobeyed you."

I clenched my hands. "Madame, you must not say such things to me."

But she touched her fingers to mine. "Mon-

sieur, I beg you. Hear me out before you speak. As to my coming here, I promised you that I would not turn westward, — but I could not help it."

"I know, madame."

"My cousin — he was — he was a spy, after all. He deceived us both. He was carrying peace belts. But — but I am sure that he had moments of saying to himself that he would refuse to act the spy. When he lied to me, and told me that he had no purpose but my safety, I think that he thought he spoke the truth."

"I know, madame."

"But when — when I saw what he had done, when I saw that we were going west, I warned him that I would leave him. I told him, too, that he was going to his death. He did not believe me. No watch was kept on me. He had a small canoe; I took it one night. I had provision — a little — I — I — I am here, monsieur."

I stood with my eyes down. "Your cousin wished to follow you. The Indians restrained him. It was as I told you. He was not a coward at the last, madame."

I heard her quick breath. "My cousin, — he was very weak. But he would have liked not to be. I think that he would have liked to be such a man as you, monsieur."

If I had been a live man I should have cried

out at the irony of having to hear her say that to me. But I could not feel even shame.

"Hush, hush!" I said slowly. "It is my turn now. Madame, I knew that you were in the Seneca camp."

"But I was not."

"It is the same as if you were. We had news from Indian runners that Starling had turned west and joined Pemaou. I knew that he would take you to the Senecas." I stopped and forced myself to look at her. But I found no horror in her face. There was still that strange glow of pride that had not faded since she talked to Cadillac. I saw that she did not understand. My voice was thick, but I tried to speak again. She interrupted.

"This is not a surprise to me. This wilderness that seems so lonely is full of eyes and ears. I feared that you would hear that we had turned west."

Her face was unsteady with tenderness. I had never seen her look like that. I warded her away though she was several feet distant. "You do not understand," I said. "I knew that you were in the camp, yet I gave the signal to attack it. I gave the signal to attack it with Indians, and you were inside."

"But I was not inside, monsieur."

"I believed you to be, and I gave the signal."

"But, monsieur, I" —

"Madame, I believed you to be in the camp, and I gave the signal to attack it."

She was silent at that, and I knew that at last she understood. We stood side by side. I looked at the litter in Cadillac's tent, and counted it piece by piece. There were clothes, papers, a handmill for grinding maize. I felt her touch my hand.

"Will you sit beside me on the couch?"

I followed her. She sat facing me, just out of reach of my hand. The light in the tent was blue and dim, but I could see the breath flutter in her throat. I looked at her. I should never be alone with her again. I should never again look at her in this way. I tried to hold the moment, and not blur it. I looked at the lips that I had never kissed. I watched the rise and fall of the bosom where my head had never lain. She was speaking, but I could hardly understand.

"I was three days in the woods before I found the Pottawatamies," she said. "I was alone all night with the stars and the trees. I thought of everything. I thought of this, monsieur. I was sure you would do — what you did."

I stared at her stupidly.

She reached out and touched my hand. "Monsieur, listen. I have lived beside you. I know you to be a man of fixed purpose and fanatic

honor. When such a man as you lays out a path for himself, he will follow it even if he has to trample on what is in his way, — even if he has to trample on his heart, monsieur."

I could not follow her argument. "You should not touch my hand." I drew it away. "You do not understand, after all. Madame, I gave the signal knowing it meant your murder." I rose, and stood like stone. My arms hung like weights by my side, but I would not look away from her.

She rose, too. I saw a strange, wild brightness flame into her eyes.

"Monsieur," she whispered. "I understand so much more than you realize. Listen. You will listen? Monsieur, until now you have always laughed. You have been gay, — gay at all times. Yet, through it all I have seen — I have always seen — your terrible power of self-crucifixion. Oh, I have seen it; I have feared it; I have loved it! I have tried to get away from it. But always I have been conscious of it. It is you. It has ruled all your dealings with me. Else why did you take me with you? Why did you marry me? So in this matter. You knew that the safety of the west, and of the Indians who trusted you, lay in attacking this camp. I knew that you would attack it. Monsieur, monsieur, now will you touch my hand?"

I stepped back. "You cannot want to touch my hand. Madame, you do not know what you are saying."

But she did not move. "Monsieur, will you never believe that I understand?"

I could not answer. I turned from her. The air was black. I seized her fur cloak which lay on the couch and pressed it in my hands. I knew that my breath rattled in groans like a dying man's. If I had tried to speak I should have snatched her to me. I held fast to the table. I had no thought of what she was thinking. I knew only that I must stand there silent if I was to get away from her in safety. If I touched her, if I looked at her, I should lose control, and take what she would give in pity. I fought to save her as well as myself from my madness.

At last she spoke, and her voice was tired and quiet. "You wish me to go, monsieur?"

That brought me to my manhood. I went to her and looked down at her brown head; the brave brown head that she had carried so high through all the terror and unkindness that had come to her. I touched her hair with my lips, and I grew as quiet as she.

"Mary," I said, "it is I who must go away at once before I make trouble for both of us. You are trying to forgive me, but you cannot do it.

You may think you have done it, but the time would come when you would look at me in horror, as you looked at Starling. I could stand death better. I know that you cannot forgive me. I knew it at the moment when I gave the signal to attack the camp. You can never forgive me."

She lifted her eyes to mine. "I have not forgiven you, monsieur. There is nothing to forgive."

I let myself look at her, and all my calmness left me. I shut my teeth and tried to hold myself in bounds.

"Mary!" I groaned, "be careful! Be careful! It is not your pity I want. If you forgive me for pity" —

I could not finish, for she gave a little sob. She turned to me. "It is you who marry for pity," she cried, with her eyes brimming. "I could not. I would not. And I have nothing to forgive; nothing, nothing. I would not have had you do anything else. I was proud of you. Oh, so proud, so proud! If you had done anything else I could never have — Monsieur, do you love me — a little?"

I took her in my arms. I held her close to me and looked into her eyes. I looked deep into them and into the soul of her. I saw understanding of me, acceptance of me as I was. I saw belief, heart hunger, love.

And then I laid my lips on hers. She was my wife. She was the woman God had made for me, the woman who had trusted me through more than death, and who had come to me through blood and agony and tears. She was my own, and I had her there alive. I took her to myself.

CHAPTER XXXIII

TO US AND TO OUR CHILDREN

Hours passed and the flap of Cadillac's tent was not lifted. Outside in the camp the drum beat for sunset. The woman heard it. She pushed back her soft waves of hair, and a shadow fell across the light that had been in her eyes.

"I had forgotten," she cried, with a soft tremble of wonder in her voice. "We have both forgotten. We promised the commandant that we would talk about your duty to the tribes."

I kissed her for her forgetfulness. "Talk is unnecessary," I whispered. "I have made up my mind."

But the drum's note had recalled her to what lay outside the tent walls. She sighed a little and bent to me as I sat at her feet.

"Do not make up your mind yet," she begged with a curious, tender reluctance. "Let me tell you something first."

I pressed her hand between my own. "I cannot listen. I can only feel. Tell me, when did you love me first?"

She raised her hand to hide a tide of color. "Monsieur, it is my shame," she cried, with

a little half sob of exultance. "It is my shame, but I will tell you. The night — the night that we were married, I lay awake for hours beset by jealousy of the woman of the miniature. Oh, I am indeed shamed! But how could I help it? Your walk, your laugh, your way of carrying your head! How could I keep from loving you? But I fought it. I fought it. I knew we had to part. I went to sleep every night with that thought uppermost."

I took the hand I held, and quieted its trembling against my lips. "You are my wife," I said. "We shall never part. We shall live together till we are very old." The marvel of my own words awed me.

But she begged me to hear her out. "I must speak of the past," she went on. "It leads to what I would have you say to the commandant. Will you listen?"

"I will try."

"Then — then let me speak of the day we parted. I saw that I had to leave you. I knew — I thought I knew — that country was more sacred than individual happiness. But I was weaker than I thought. When I saw Michillimackinac fade, when I knew that I should never see you again, my life seemed to stop. I begged my cousin to take me back. I — I begged till I fainted."

I could not keep my hands from clenching. "And he refused you?" I asked with my lips dry, and I knew that my voice showed hate of a man who was dead.

She did not answer my question, and when she did not defend him I knew that he had been hard to her. "I must have remained unconscious a long time," she hurried on, "for when I came to myself again the country was different and the sun was low. I was exhausted, and I could not think as I had done. You had said that patriotism was a man-made feeling, and I repeated your words over and over. It was all I could seem to remember. I could not see why our parting had been necessary. I wonder if you can understand. It was as if I had been reborn into a new set of beliefs. All that had seemed inevitable and great had grown trivial. I could not see distinctions as I had. God made us — English, French, Indians. I could not understand what patriotism stood for, after all. I did not know what had come upon my mind, but I saw that words that I had thought worth sacrificing life for had lost their meaning. And so — and so — You see what I would say. I have changed. If you wish to lead the tribes you are not to think of me."

I rose and drew her to me. "But, Mary, I no longer wish to lead the tribes."

She could not understand me, as indeed I could not wholly understand myself. She looked at me gravely and long, and she tried to find the truth in me, — the truth that was out of sight; the truth about myself that even I did not know.

"Was the commandant right?" she queried. "Is it anxiety about me that has changed your plans?"

I could only shake my head at her. "I am not sure." Then I sat beside her and tried to explain. "Simon is dead. Pierre died saving me. Leclerc and Labarthe died under torture. I sacrificed them to enforce a belief. And now the belief is a phantom. It is very strange. Mary, we have traveled by different roads, but we have reached the same goal. My ambition for conquest is put away."

She drew a long breath, and I saw splendid understanding of me in the look she gave. Yet she was unconvinced.

"Perhaps this feeling may pass," she argued. "It may be temporary. Then you will regret your lost hold with the tribes."

I smiled at her. "I love you," I murmured. "I love you. I love you. I am tired of talk of blood and war. Mary, you accepted me as I was; accept me, if you can, as I am now. I cannot analyze myself. I cannot promise what I will believe as time goes on. But this I know. I was

born with a sword in my hand, but now I cannot use it — for aggression. I do not mean that I think it is wrong. I do not know what I believe. Time will tell."

The strange light that made her seem all spirit flamed in the glance that thanked me.

"Yet think well," she cautioned. "I — I am proud of you." Her voice sank to a whisper. "Sometimes even my love seems swallowed in my pride in you. I live on my pride in your power. Think of your unfinished work. No, no, you must go on."

I took her by the shoulders. "You strange, double woman!" I cried, with my voice unsteady. "You command me to do something, the while you are trembling from head to foot for fear I will obey. Will you always play the martyr to your spirit? Mary, I shall not lead the tribes."

"But your unfinished work!"

"What was worth doing has been done. This crisis is past. The west will be safe from the Iroquois for some time. There is other work for me. We will go to France. I have business there. Then I would show the world my wife."

Yet she held me away a moment longer. "You can do this without regret?"

I folded her to me. "It is the only path I see before me," I answered her.

And then, for the first time, she sobbed as she lay in my arms.

A little later we stood together in the tent door. The sunset was lost in the woods behind and the shadows were long and cool. The camp was gay. All memory of death and conquest was put aside, and the men were living in the moment. French and Indians were feasting, and there were song and talk and the movement of lithe bodies, gayly clad. The water babbled strange songs upon the shore, and the forest was full of quiet and mystery. The wilderness, the calm, unfathomed wilderness, had forgotten sorrow and carnage. We forgot, too.

I suddenly laughed as of old, and the sound did not jar. The woman on my arm laughed with me. A thrush was singing. Life was before me, and the woman of my love loved me. My blood tingled and I breathed deep. The wood smoke — the smoke of the pathfinder's fire — pricked keen in my nostrils.

I pointed the woman to the forest. "We shall come back to it," I cried. "We leave it now, but we shall come back to it, some time, somehow. Perhaps we shall be settlers, explorers. I do not know. But we shall come back. This land belongs to us; to us and to our children and our children's children. French or English, what will it matter then? It will be a new race."

The woman turned. I heard her quick breath and saw the red flood her from chin to brow. "A new race!" she repeated, and her eyes grew dark with the splendor of the thought. She clasped her hands, and looked to the west over the unmapped forest, and I knew that for the moment her blood was pulsing, not for me, but for that unborn race which was to hold this land. I had married a woman, yes, but also I had married a poet and a dreamer and a will incarnate. It was such spirit as hers that would shape the destinies of nations yet to come.

I laughed again, and the joy of life ran through me like delirium.

"Come!" I cried to her. "Come, we will tell Cadillac that to-morrow we start for Montreal. The sooner we leave, the sooner we return, — return to smell the wood smoke, and try the wilderness together. Come, Mary, come."

And wrapping my wife in the cloak that the savage king had given her, I led her out and stood beside her while I sent the tribes upon their way.

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